Losing You Terrifies Me

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Archive Warnings:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence, Major Character Death
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Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham & Hannibal Lecter, Molly Graham/Will Graham, Jimmy Price/Brian Zeller, Alana Bloom/Margot Verger
Characters:	Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham, Brian Zeller, Jimmy Price, Beverly Katz, Molly Graham, Walter "Wally" Graham, Alana Bloom, Margot Verger, Morgan Verger, Jack Crawford, Original Characters, Abigail Hobbs, Mischa Lecter
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Losing You Terrifies Me

by A_David

Summary

Gentle. That was the word the monster had used. Will would hold onto that word as if it were the only thing in the universe. Because it was gentle. Each skim of lips and trace of tongue, each brush of fingers and dip of hips were nothing but gently maddening, sending Will so far into himself that he thought he would never be found again, only to be pulled back by books and wine and a weightless timelessness, free of the rules of physics and mathematics.

Will suffers from a case of amnesia after the fall and attempts to kill Hannibal whenever he relapses.

Notes

Here's that really long ass fic I was talking about in my other Hannigram story. I hope to try to have weekly updates for you guys. I've got a long list of chapters already, so we'll see. Maybe I'll do two chapters a week. Currently up to 37 chapters and still going strong. There's also going to be a lot of other languages in this story because Will kinda has a kink for them and Hannibal could never say no. I'll post what they mean at the end of the chapter. I hope you enjoy. Please let me know what you think! Thank you guys!

Ps. Also not sure whose art I used for my first picture. If anyone knows, let me know so I can give credit. It's an amazing picture.

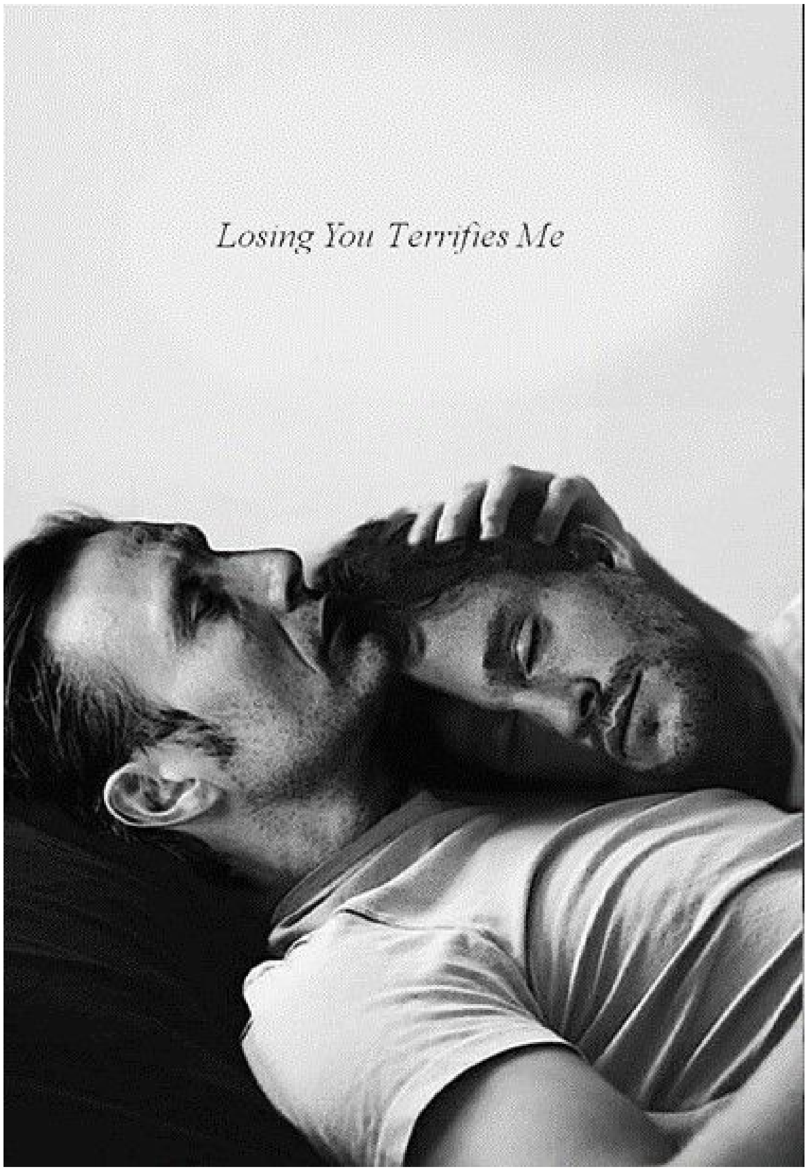
Update!
Someone has been lovely enough to start translating this into Turkish for me.
https://archiveofourown.org/works/58274794

Update: Child of Lilith made me this awesome playlist for this story. I might have gone overboard and added a lot more songs that I use to write this story. Here's the link.
https://open.spotify.com/playlist/65khRpKmjgRytQWwoG4hqo
Thank you so much!!!

See the end of the work for more notes

- Translation into Türkçe available: Losing You Terrifies Me (Türkçe Çeviri) by delayedventura

Chapter 1



He couldn’t remember having felt this empty. Not for a long while. The last time he had felt like this had been when his sister had died.

But this man wasn't his sister. The way this man clung to him wasn't like his sister. The way this man's eyes begged for something else to be the truth and what had happened to be a fake reality that they were all trapped in was not like his sister.

The cry of shock and pain still clawed to the air, the man's mouth hanging open in surprise as a warm stickiness collected between their tight bodies.

The hope that had been in Will's beautiful blue eyes was gone, replaced with betrayal that Hannibal knew all too well. But the longer Hannibal looked, the more he reconsidered Will's eye color.

It wasn't really blue. There wasn't really a color blue, just a lack of pigment refracting light particles with the shortest wavelength, like the sky.

The sky...

It felt like he would never see the sky again. Not with how Will tumbled from his grip and to the kitchen floor, the darkness of his blood now mixing with the other's blood that was already puddling.

They were supposed to go together, but Hannibal hadn't been blind. He had been giving and taking, pushing and pulling, hoping beyond hope that Will would see like him.

And oh, Will saw. It was one of his greatest weaknesses and one of his most fascinating aspects. But it wasn't enough to see. It had never been enough to see. To do. Now that was what Hannibal had wanted. Will to do something, something beautiful and breathtaking like Botticelli.

Will had been Hannibal's Botticelli. From the moment they had found each other, he could see Will as a great renaissance artist and Hannibal the humble canvas or the guiding mentor, sculpting Will into the God that Will deserved to be.

None of that mattered now. And it hadn't since the phone call, though Hannibal would be lying if he hadn't found the act endearing.

Will had wanted Hannibal to run and whether or not that was the once upon a time teacher channeling Hannibal himself from the Garret Jacob Hobbs' case or genuinely concerned for Hannibal, Hannibal couldn't say.

And the rain was cold, Will's warmth falling away into the night along with everything that Hannibal had allowed himself to grow comfortable with. He had broken his own careful rules and it had led to this. To him having to destroy something he had come to love, if this is what love felt like.

He had loved each person that was left for dead. They were his friends, or he had come to think of them this way. And what was blood and games between friends?

An end. That's what it was, what it was always going to be. Just because he had grown attached didn't mean that he wasn't going to protect himself. He came first, always first.

And not even Will Graham's tempera blue eyes would come before self preservation.

Eyes fluttered open in the darkness, shirt drenched with sweat. It took a moment for breathing to return back to a normal pace and it gave Hannibal a sense of amusement that even killers could have nightmares.

The memory hugged at Hannibal's stiff muscles as he pulled himself from the lavish bed and freed himself of the hindrance of his nightshirt.

Pain pulled at the wound in his stomach that had been healing rather well, considering everything that had happened and it took the small amusement away.

Pain wasn't something Hannibal much enjoyed lingering. The first taste was delicious, like a fine wine or a good aged cheese, but after a while, one could grow bored of the flavor and Hannibal had.

He got to his feet and found his slippers and robe, unable to let his high maintenance or taste go. If he was bound to live far away from things he loved to do, he was going to make sure he was comfortable in his misery with things he loved to wear, eat and look at.

With silk now soothing his aching shoulders, he wandered his way through the suite. It wasn't Italy, it wasn't France, it wasn't Austria, but it was working.

And New York City had its own special charm, Hannibal supposed. It wasn't as old or as rich in history, but it made up for it with good alcohol and art exhibits.

And he wasn't planning on staying here long, even if the piano and bar were nice after a long day of reading or drawing. He was biding his time until he could move them and in this current state that wasn't a choice.

Hannibal paused in his step beside the bar and looked out at the open curtains that had the nightlife pouring in through it.

His eyes dropped to a curly haired figure on the couch, outlined from the streetlamps below.

With a fresh glass of chardonnay, Hannibal stepped over to the couch, bathed in light from curtains that he had closed before he went to bed.

Will sat with a blank stare out of the window, a glass of amber liquid undrank and in one hand.

His cheek still had some stitching in it and his shoulder was wrapped and horribly bruised. The rest of him was well, even after the fall. Will had only sustained a concussion, which was a breeze to take care of for Hannibal.

All of it had been a breeze and Hannibal was more than certain that Jack Crawford might have been one of the reasons.

No one was looking for them. The warnings had dissipated as interest feigned. Hannibal had been more than watchful. Their faces were gone from the news, but that didn't mean they were off the hook.

"I didn't expect to see you up," Hannibal commented, watching curiously as Will didn't even so much as glance in his direction.

"The city that never sleeps," he muttered softly, simply blinking out at the city scape before him. "Never saw you living here."

"I can't very well show my face back in Europe quite yet," Hannibal responded, sniffing at his drink before taking a small sip, letting the flavor envelope his tongue fully before swallowing.

"You plan to go back?" Will's small voice questioned.

Hannibal hummed with a small nod. "That was always the plan."

"My mind feels fuzzy," Will whispered, eyes finally drifting lazily from the window and to where Hannibal still stood. "And my limbs are heavy."

Hannibal couldn't help the smile that pulled at the corners of his lips and he tried to hide it behind another sip of wine. "I have you on some very good medication. There shouldn't be any pain."

"You're not going to try to cut open my head again, are you?" Will's head tipped to the side on a weak neck.

There was a spark of joy that shot through Hannibal at the memory, something smokey and hot. "Always the comedian," Hannibal said with a hint of a tease behind it. He inhaled deeply and glanced around the room before taking a seat on the cushion next to Will and those blue eyes.

Will's head tipped to the other side to watch Hannibal's movements as if that would protect him, not that it would do much to help him. He wasn't all that worried and it might have been the drugs, but Will didn't think he could push through the fog enough to really put much effort behind the conclusion.

Hannibal loved the way that Will's drugged eyes trailed over his body in the dark. They were alive despite the heavy medication.

Two, three, four times his eyes wandered the killer and Hannibal would always cherish the way those eyes lingered on different parts of him and the way the inflection in the blue would change with Will's thoughts, so curious as to what was running through the man's head.

"Couldn't sleep?" Will finally settled on, words holding a slight slur, southern accent slipping out. Will had taken in every detail of Hannibal and did his best to put the pieces together through the mess in his mind. The bed head, the bags under tired eyes, the open robe and bare chest.

"Your diagnosis?" Hannibal asked, finger absently caressing the rim of his glass, maroon eyes locked on Will intently.

"Nightmares." Will's tone was solid. "The question is..." Will's hand trembled as he pushed all of his strength into his arm to lift his whiskey to his lips and take a drink to wet his cottonmouth. "What do you have to be afraid of, Dr. Lecter?"

Hannibal gave a small amused huff of air and reached out, taking the glass from Will's hand. "I would suggest not adding alcohol to the cocktail that's already swirling through your body, Will."

Will couldn't have fought the man even if he wanted to. There was concern in Hannibal's tone that Will had learned was strictly for him. Not even Abigail had ever received the same level of unease that Will had in Hannibal's voice and Will was sure that made him special.

Hannibal placed both glasses aside on the coffee table that was more like a mirror in the dark, the bustling cars leaving light trails on the glass.

"Do I have to guess?" Will pushed on, eyes following Hannibal as the man got comfortable on the couch.

Hannibal licked his lips, thinking over the responses in his mind before deciding on one. He shook his head and met Will's eyes, with a small, "No."

Will did his best to turn more towards the man beside him and was sure the movements were not as fluid as his mind made them out to be.

"Then humor me, Dr. Lecter," Will said, his voice stronger now. "What do you have to be afraid of?"

"You."

The answer was simple and hung in the air as Will tried to take it in. Will inhaled deeply and gave a small scoff, a nervous smile on his lips, but Hannibal didn't return the expression.

"I'm nothing to be afraid of," Will threw out with a groggy shake of his head. "You can't be serious."

"Deathly."

The smile slipped from Will's mouth and his eyes once more searched the well put together man before him. Will wasn't sure how much time had passed from the cliffside to now, but Hannibal didn't look like he had changed a bit. Same grey well cut hair, clean shaven face, impeccable clothing, even if it was just evening wear.

"Why me?" Will gasped out, breath heavy as he tried to find the answer in the unreadable expression on Hannibal's face. His mind struggled even though the fog was slowly beginning to let up.

Hannibal looked over Will in silence a moment longer, eyes taking in the man's appearance. Curly hair longer than normal and so tempting, begging for fingers to tossle it. Chin and cheeks in need of a shave. Eyes still tempera blue and deliciously clouded with chemicals.

Hannibal was always careful of any movement that he made or any words he put out into the universe. He played a game of chess with fate herself and he was always so careful about the sacrificed pieces he sent forward into his war. Everything was calculated with every possible outcome present in his mind before he made a choice.

But for once in his life, he didn't think. He simply did.

Hannibal's fingers reached out and pushed at soft curls until he could fully see Will's eyes in the city lights. His fingertips traced the scar he had created, sensing the tenseness from Will as the memory swam to the forefront of the man's mind.

"Losing you terrifies me," Hannibal replied in barely more than a whisper, fingers tangling further into Will's curls.

"Then why do you want me dead?" Will's eyes slid closed as Hannibal's fingers tugged a little harder at his hair. A smirk took over Hannibal's lips at how Will still gave into any of Hannibal's whims without question.

"I only want you dead if I decide it's your time," Hannibal answered, voice husky in the dark. Hannibal's eyes watched as Will's Adam's apple bobbed with a swallow. "Now is not the time."

"And how would you do it?"

The words of the past echoed around the suite and Hannibal's smile grew hungrily, eyes dragging down Will's throat.

"With my hands."

Hands were personal. Hands were intimate. Hands would be the end of Will Graham and he welcomed it. When the time came, of course. And Will couldn't think of anyone else he trusted with his own death more than he trusted Hannibal, how ever twisted that conclusion was. Maybe he did belong back with the criminally insane...

Will's eyes flickered open at that and were met with an intense maroon gaze that bore deeply into him, seeing him inside and out.

"I'll be gentle," Hannibal pushed into the silence between them. The hand still lost in Will's hair loosened its grip and traveled down to Will's jawline. An index finger hooked his chin and lifted his face until his neck was fully exposed, pale in the light. "You'll enjoy it."

The words were whispered with a warm breath that Will could feel against his skin like brush fire. Whispers of breath kept contact, oxygenating the fire enough to flush the investigator's cheeks.

Hannibal watched closely as the blush crept from Will's cheeks, to his neck, the dip of his collarbone and across a bare chest, under bandages.

Hannibal let Will's chin go free and whether it was due to the drugs in his system or not, Will's stance didn't change, neck bared against the moonlight.

Hannibal took in the marble artwork for a moment more, internally fighting a war with himself that he didn't have to engage in very often. The normally quiet voice in his head, that he could push down for more logic based reasoning, was screaming at him to give in for once.

Through the cloudiness of Will's mind, something bright and brilliant pushed its way in, being the first clear thing Will had experienced all night.

A whimper left Will's parted lips without his permission at a pair of wicked teeth against his neck. One of Will's hands shot over his mouth, the other clutching at Hannibal's silk covered shoulder for balance in the mist that was in his mind.

Will's pulse fluttered like hummingbird's wings beneath Hannibal's lips and his tongue trailed the vein, exciting another delectable sound from Will, though it was muffled.

Will wasn't sure if his mind had ever been so clear before in his life. His senses felt anything but dull the longer Hannibal leaned over him.

A dangerous thought was sharp in his mind as Hannibal's teeth grazed across his skin and over his pulse. One of the very last memories that Will had of Hannibal was the man ripping The Red Dragon's throat out with his teeth. The same teeth that now danced down to Will's collar.

It was carnal, lighting through Will at how easily Will trusted he wouldn't meet the same fate. A man with the taste for flesh, Will's own flesh, with teeth so close to what could end him in seconds. It was obscene how arousing the idea was and Will was ashamed of that being his only clarity.

There was a shift beside Will on the couch and pressure was added to either side of his legs as Hannibal straddled him. Hannibal gathered up Will's wrists and trapped them above the man's head at the top of the couch.

Hannibal looked over Will fully, proud of his work that would surely leave Will marked as his when morning decided to break.

Hannibal watched as Will's chest heaved, rising and falling rapidly as Will's blue eyes looked everywhere but where Hannibal wanted them.

"Look at me," he commanded, voice gentle but firm, accent thicker than it normally was. Will's eyes immediately shot to Hannibal's face at the order, breathing only more labored at the sight of swollen lips. Hannibal leaned closer, warm breath now fluttering across Will's face. "All of your attention must always be on me."

Will gave a single nod in response and Hannibal smirked. "Good boy," he whispered, words now in Will's ear, making Will shiver horribly. "Never cover your mouth in front of me again, do you understand?" Will gave another nod, letting the heat from Hannibal's body sink into his, defrosting his flesh that he hadn't thought as freezing until this point. "I want to always hear your voice."

Before Will could focus in on an understanding, Hannibal's tongue licked at the shell of Will's ear.

"Hannibal," Will gasped, squirming under the tight grip. He could hear Hannibal's low rumbling chuckle in his ear. Teeth snatched at his ear lobe and the moan that left Will made his shame bloom across his skin in rose petals.

Lips traced his skin tantalizingly slow, to his jaw and over his cheeks, a breath away from a feeling Will had dreamed about more than once before he was torn to pieces by the man over him.

"Will," Hannibal whispered, lips hovering just above Will's. Will's eyes were clouded over, but on Hannibal, just as ordered. " *Aš tave suvalgysiu* ."

“I don’t know what that means,” Will muttered, eyes flickering unsteadily between Hannibal’s. His tongue slipped out to wet his lips and he could see the dark flash in Hannibal’s eyes.

“Yes, you do,” Hannibal said slowly, making Will tremble. "Use that breath taking mind of yours."

Lips mouthed at his jaw and it only made Will's mind hazier, his thoughts evading him as he struggled for an answer that he knew Hannibal would want.

The words repeated over and over in Will's mind, echoing through the stark empty mind palace he had slowly been building. It took a moment longer for the words to finally find purchase and Will gasped as teeth bit into the flesh just below his jawline.

"Devour me," Will blurted out, squirming under the teeth that were assaulting him.

Before Will could catch his breath, Hannibal's lips attacked his hungrily. Will sat powerless under Hannibal's grip and wondered if his other victims felt as alive when Hannibal took over them.

Electricity shot through each of his faculties and to the tips of his fingers and toes. His body moved naturally against the restraints on his wrists, back arching off the back of the couch when Hannibal's tongue trailed a path over Will's lips.

Will's mouth was sweet, tongue torturous as it met Hannibal's. It reminded him of Capezzoli di Venere, deep rich dark chocolate, chestnuts and a healthy portion of brandy swirling together in a mind numbing confection.

Hannibal couldn't help but notice how awake Will felt beneath him. Pulse fluttering madly against Hannibal's fingers. Wired and responsive to his touch. Sounds lewd and alert, making Hannibal's insides twist in a way he had never felt them do before.

It wasn't unpleasant and Hannibal wanted more, as always. Greedy as ever. Everything was for him and his pleasures. No one came between him and what he wanted, but tonight was a night of firsts and it wasn't about to stop.

There was a sharp inhale from Will and he pulled away from Hannibal with a grimace on his face and clenched teeth. His body hesitantly reclined back into the couch and Hannibal was swift to release his hold, actually surprising himself with how he cared if he hurt the empath or not.

Wills arms slowly dropped to his sides and one of his hands went to the bandaging that covered his shoulder, face still screwed up in pain and teeth still bared. Will's other hand rested on Hannibal's knee, gently rubbing assurance into the fabric that covered skin.

"I think the medication wore off," Will whispered, palm of his hand instinctively putting pressure on the stab wound in an attempt to alleviate some of the pain. His eyes slid closed and he took a deep breath.

"I-" Hannibal's voice cracked and one of Will's eyes opened enough to watch as a fist went to Hannibal's mouth and he cleared his throat. "I can give you some more, but it will most likely put you back to sleep."

"Maybe you should take some too," Will teased softly, voice barely above a whisper. There was no mistaking the drowsiness that plagued Will's tone. "Nightmares do not become you, Dr. Lecter."

Will watched curiously as the normally so well put together man before him looked away and a slight pink tinge covered his high cheekbones.

"Hannibal?" Will questioned, hand caressing the man's knee from where he still sat, straddling Will's lap. Hannibal's amber eyes met Will's in the darkness. "When did you start dreaming about me?"

Hannibal simply shook his head in answer and climbed from the couch to go to the kitchen where he dug through a cabinet of medical supplies until he found what he was looking for. With a small glass vile and a syringe now in hand, Hannibal knelt down beside Will.

"I'm not going to wake up dead, am I?"

The question stained the air and made Hannibal smile, a small sense of control starting to form for him again. His fingers worked on opening the syringe and he shoved the tip of the needle into the lid of the vile, the liquid crystal clear as it danced in the moonlight.

"You wouldn't wake up," Hannibal corrected, taking Will's arm and looking carefully over it, fingers gliding across soft skin.

"Am I going to wake up?" Will asked, shivering at the light contact of Hannibal's fingertips. Will's eyes looked over the glimmering needle tiredly.

"Do you want to wake up?"

Will's gaze dropped to Hannibal who sat quietly, expecting an answer. Will tossed the question around in his slightly clearer mind, tasting each aspect of it carefully, the way he had learned to do whenever he dined with Hannibal.

The words that came from Will's mouth caught him off guard and they must have had the same effect on the killer because his eyebrows rose inquisitively.

"Only if I'm beside you."

"You're married Will," Hannibal muttered, trying to dismiss the comment by pulling Will's arm a little closer. Will winced as the needle pressed into his skin and a slight burn entered his forearm. "I don't believe-"

"Don't grow a conscience on me now," Will interrupted, dragging a maroon gaze to his face. The needle was pulled free and Will could already begin to feel the fog slipping over his mind once more. He did his best to fight through it even though he knew he would lose. "You kissed me, remember?"

"Yes," Hannibal said softly, getting from the floor to throw the syringe away. "I did." When Hannibal returned, he looked over Will who was still in the very same position. "And I want to keep kissing you, Will Graham."

Blue eyes made of Botticelli brush strokes stared at Hannibal through the haze of medication and Hannibal sighed.

What a wicked game they were playing. What wicked things Will did to him. Will infected every single one of his dreams, every single waking thought. It was like a disease. It was torture to love him.

"I want you to keep kissing me," Will's slurred voice said into the open night. "I want everything you have to offer."

"You're letting the medicine speak for you," Hannibal warned. "Let's get you back to bed."

Will stuck out an arm haphazardly and Hannibal took it, pulling Will to his feet. The man stumbled and Hannibal quickly scooped Will into his arms, ignoring the stiffness from the bullet wound. Will couldn't walk now. He shouldn't have even been out of bed in the first place.

Will's arms circled around Hannibal's neck and Hannibal did his best to ignore how Will's head rested against his shoulder, breath warm against his neck.

"I was serious," Will said as Hannibal began his trip around the coffee table that he still needed to clean. "I want to wake up beside you or not at all."

Hannibal's footing stuttered and it was enough to make Will sit up to meet Hannibal's eyes with concern. Hannibal was shocked. He had never had a person be so willingly close to him. Not even Alana had meant anything to him. She was simply a pawn to his fated game of chess.

But Will...

Will was special. Will had always been special.

"You'll be sorry," Hannibal cautioned despite the fact that he was sure Will's cognitive abilities were mostly shut down. "You won't like me in the sunlight."

Will didn't say anything, simply shook his head and rested back against Hannibal in exhaustion, nuzzling his face deep into Hannibal's neck.

Hannibal's feet moved of their own accord, not listening to the logical voice in his mind, instead listening to the small voice that seemed to be winning every battle that night.

Hannibal found himself in his own room that still smelled of night terrors, despair, and sweat.

He gently lied Will into his bed, staring down and the weak body that was one hundred percent in his control. He could end it here and now if he really wanted to. There were so many ways too. Overdose, strangulation, and smothering were among the first few ideas to push into Hannibal's mind, but he ignored them.

He slid out of his slippers and removed his silk robe, deciding to leave cleaning up to a future Hannibal.

The bed was accepting and dragged Hannibal down into it, a tiredness in his limbs that he had not noticed before.

He pulled the blankets over Will's body and then his own, his eyes shutting, Hannibal spent.

Hannibal jumped, eyes shooting open as Will's head came to rest on his chest, fitting so naturally that Hannibal swore their bodies were made with the other in mind.

Fatigued fingers tangled themselves in the hair across Hannibal's chest and Will's breath was hot against Hannibal's bare skin.

Will's small snores filled the room and Hannibal's fingers once more tangled in dark curls. He leaned down and placed a kiss to Will's head. He would deal with the aftermath tomorrow. The consequences could be a problem for another day.

Aš tave suvalgysiu - I will eat you

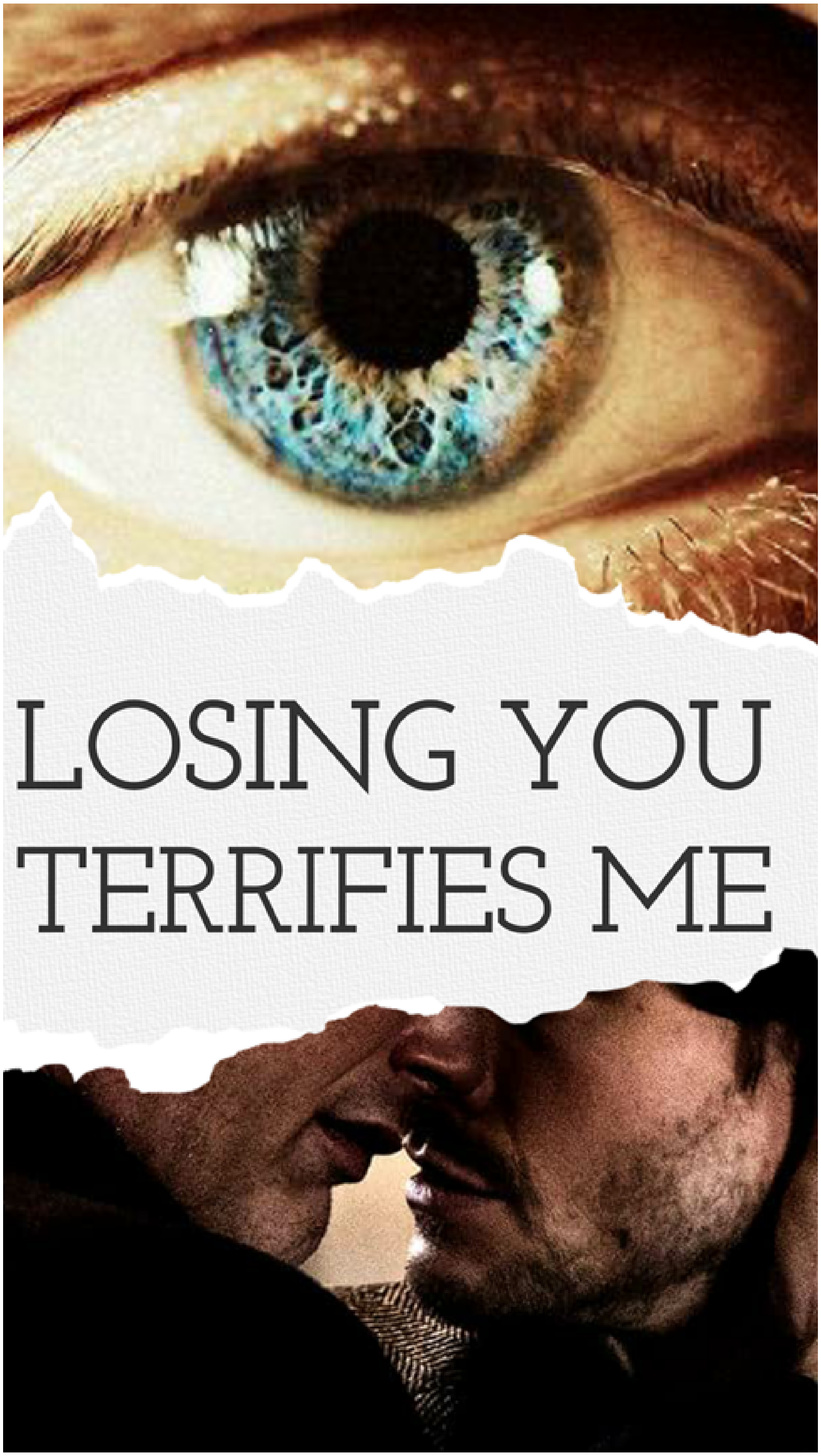
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

> "Why was I in your bed, Dr. Lecter?" Will questioned, unsure if first names were quite appropriate. Hannibal slowly sat up, avoiding Will's gaze.
>
> "A condition of last night's conversation." His voice was firm and final as if telling Will not to challenge him. "I would not put much thought to it."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes


LOSING YOU
TERRIFIES ME

Will woke to the smell of something cooking and slowly sat up. Delicious scents filled the room and in the daylight Will could finally make out the room around him.

His arm gave a painful twinge as he pushed himself up from the bed. The bed was large and plush with rich colored bedding that reminded Will of the wine Hannibal liked to drink.

The architecture was gaudy and Will had a deep sense that it didn't fit the city they were in, though he wasn't exactly sure where they were.

The golds and blues and reds reminded Will of the buildings all over Florence. Over the top and overwhelming. But that was Hannibal.

Will carefully walked through the bedroom and out into the rest of the apartment that was not nearly as gaudy as the bedroom. In fact, it was cold and modern and it occurred to Will that maybe Hannibal was hiding behind the want of a better time with how he had decorated the bedroom.

Will found Hannibal at the stove in the kitchen, a spatula in hand, carefully maneuvering something in a frying pan.

He was dressed down from what Will was used to seeing the man wear. A knit sweater and slacks instead of his normal three piece suit and tie.

Will stepped closer to the dining table and found two place settings at one end and then at the other were stacks of papers. Across them, in incredibly fine details, was the city of New York. Tall buildings with complex shadows and lighting. And several others of cliffs with lighthouses on them, something familiar about the shape and the details of the coast line.

"These are beautiful," Will commented with a voice that felt like sandpaper.

"You're awake," Hannibal said, stating the fact like it was the only real thing left in the world. "How is the pain?"

"I'm stiff," Will answered, turning back to the kitchen and to where Hannibal was adding something else to the frying pan. "But that's to be expected."

"So it is," Hannibal answered with a nod. He walked briskly to the table, frying pan in hand and he scooped the omlet he had made onto a plate. "Please," Hannibal said, eyes meeting Will's. "Sit. Eat. I will join you in a moment." With that, he went back to the kitchen and quickly cracked several more eggs into a bowl with some cream and whisked them together.

Will took a seat at the place setting that Hannibal had indicated. He reached out and poured himself a cup of coffee, adding a small amount of cream and sugar.

He took a sip and winced at the heat that assaulted his tongue, making it burn with a sticky sweetness. He placed the coffee aside and picked up a slice of toasted bread from a stack, buttering it as he waited for Hannibal's presence at the dining table.

He took a single bite before discarding the toast to his plate. He folded his arms on the edge of the table, deciding it was bad manners to continue eating without the chef.

"It looks delicious," Will tossed out, hoping to fill up the silent void between them, an awkwardness there that Will couldn't quite place.

"I found a small farmers market on the northern outskirts of the city. Everything is fresh, as it should be."

Will turned in his chair and watched as Hannibal moved around the small kitchen, looking firmly in his element, cleaning all while making sure his own eggs were just as perfect as Will's.

"How long have I been out?"

"A month or two." Hannibal's footsteps came around the table and he placed his own food on his plate and set the frying pan aside. "I assure you that you were well taken care of. I do keep all of my promises, even the difficult ones." Hannibal took his place at the head of the table and picked up his silverware, waiting with expectant eyes on Will.

Ever the gracious host, waiting for Will to take the first bite. Will picked up his fork and cut into the omlet, stabbing at the eggs before putting them in his mouth.

"Perfect as always," Will said, causing Hannibal to give a small smile before digging into his own food. There was silence between them, the only sound was the clanking of silverware against fine china. Finally the curiosity overcame Will and he had to ask. "What promise?"

Hannibal's movements stilled and he lowered his fork down to his plate. He wiped at his lips with a napkin before turning his full attention to Will.

"How much do you remember?"

Will's face scrunched up as he looked over Hannibal's calm stance. What was he supposed to remember? Just because Hannibal's face didn't give anything away that didn't mean his eyes were clear. There was something in their amber stare that told him Hannibal wanted to hear something specific come out of his mouth.

"I remember..." Will trailed off as he thought back through foggy and abstract memories that he wasn't even sure were real or not. He rubbed at his tired eyes and wished that he had his glasses. "The water was cold, icy."

Will sighed, licking his lips as a feeling of dread washed over him. "I couldn't find you," he admitted, the waves licking at his skin and burning his cheek as he tried to spit the blood and sea water from his mouth. "I thought I had lost you."

Hannibal listened in complete silence, watching Will carefully, trying to piece together what Will was telling him. Hannibal had his own broken memories that he couldn't make sense of and had been hoping that Will's would help put the puzzle together.

"It felt like an eternity before I was able to find you," Will continued softly, wind whipping brutally at his skin. "Took you to shore." Will lowered his hands and looked over Hannibal's curiously raised eyebrows. "You weren't breathing."

Hannibal's hand went to his chest and touched at phantom bruising that was no longer there. "CPR?"

Will gave a nod and rubbed at his mouth that was suddenly very dry. "I'm not fully inept when it comes to medical training."

"I never implied that you were," Hannibal muttered, reaching out for Will's hand. Will jumped at the contact as if Hannibal had pulled him from his own mind. "We do not have to discuss this further if it upsets you."

"I'm not upset," Will corrected, letting the caressing of Hannibal's thumb on his hand pull him back into the present. "I was scared. I'm still scared."

"Of what?"

"Losing you terrifies me."

The words held something familiar in them that Will couldn't exactly place as if he had heard them in a dream before. But at Hannibal's widened gaze he put the words more in the category of a deeply hidden memory that he needed to try to find. But Will would save that for later.

"I pulled you back to the-the cave. I tried to stop the bleeding and start a fire, but I-I passed out," Will continued, his free hand rubbing at his left temple where a migraine was beginning to set in. "I remember lights. Bright lights. And medical equipment. Blood everywhere." His eyes widened as he looked over Hannibal. "You performed..." Will trailed off as he tried to push the horror of the situation down.

"My own surgery?" Hannibal asked with a confirming nod. "Cheap liquor does wonder for the nerves, but not for steady hands." Hannibal pulled his hand free of Will's and he went back to eating his food so that it wouldn't go cold. "I did yours sober. Hands as steady as a dancer en pointe."

"But you're alright, right?" Will asked with concern throughout his voice, catching Hannibal off guard. Hannibal finished his mouthful before politely meeting Will's gaze.

"I'm here, aren't I?"

"That's not what I asked you," Will muttered, pushing his unfinished plate aside and turning to face Hannibal more head on. "You're physically alright?"

Hannibal gave a nod. "The first few days were unpleasant, but nothing that I couldn't take care of." His eyes lowered to Will's plate. "Please finish. You need to eat something. You've been on a diet of broths and yogurts. That's hardly sustainable for long periods of time."

Will sighed, calling Hannibal's eyes back to Will's thin face that really was in bad need of a shave. "And the promise?"

"I promised to take care of you," Hannibal supplied, though it didn't bring any new memories to the forefront of Will's mind. "And take care of you I will. So, dear clever boy, eat your food before I force you to."

With that, and an air of wanting the conversation to come to a close, Hannibal snatched up his dishes and went back to the kitchen where Will could hear the water turn on so that Hannibal could begin washing up.

Will pulled the plate back to him and took another bite of his eggs, eyes looking out at the living room. His eyes landed curiously on two glasses of unfinished drinks on the coffee table. His head tipped to the side in question and Will found himself leaving the dining table in the direction of the living room.

"Was someone here?" he asked, sitting down on the couch and getting level with the glasses. One was a wine glass with a type of white wine in it that looked like it had barely been touched. The other was a glass of liquid that held the same heat as Hannibal's eyes, not more than two fingers of liquid that hadn't been touched at all.

"No," Hannibal replied from where he still was in the kitchen. "Fetch those for me so I can clean them." There was a slight hint of disappointment in his tone and Will wasn't exactly sure why.

"Whose were these?" Will picked up the two glasses and carried them to the kitchen. He held them out and Hannibal's hands took Will's. His eyes trailed over Will's face carefully, trying to verify if Will really didn't recall what had happened. "Hannibal?"

"Ours," Hannibal answered with a deep breath, making Will feel like he had ripped Hannibal from a more pleasant reality. "We had a lovely chat last night." Hannibal pulled the cups free from Will's grasp and turned immediately back to the sink, speaking once more before Will could ask for clarification. "Finish your breakfast, Will. I will not ask again. And when you are finished, go shower. You'll feel better. I'll have some medication for you when you're out."

With breakfast quickly finished, Will made his way in the direction of the bathroom that Hannibal pointed out to him. His hands reached into the shower and turned on the water. He froze when he spotted himself in the mirror.

Hair long and unruly, beard scruffy, face thin and gaunt and a delicate lacing of bruising around his neck as well as over his chest. His arms were thin and as he looked over the rest of himself he could see just how easily the clothes hung loosely off his body. The more he looked over himself, the more he was curious how he had enough strength to be standing. His legs were toothpicks.

The idea made Will smirk. Hannibal would applaud his choice of words.

Will carefully began to unwrap the bandages that covered his chest and he pulled bloodied gause from his stitching. His fingers trailed over the sutures and he closed his eyes at the alien feeling of his fingers on the wound.

The stiffness was worse now that more of whatever medicine Dr. Lecter had him on was wearing off. He rotated his arm the best that he could, teeth clenching at a sharp twinge there. Phantom and real pains from stabbings both long ago and recently spiderwebbed across his chest.

Will shook his head and dug through several drawers until he found a pair of scissors, tossing them onto the counter for when he was finished with his shower. The steam quickly covered the metal blades as it laced over the mirror.

The water felt good on his skin, an intense heat loosening up his tensed muscles. Will did his best to wash himself up with one hand, his other not able to lift over his head. He would have to mention that to Hannibal. Maybe the once upon a time surgeon could work on the tight muscles and help him move once more.

Once out and a towel securely around his waist, Will took the pair of scissors and began snipping away at his curls. He had cut his hair before, plenty of times. It helped him avoid human contact and there was nothing more horrid than being expected to make small talk while someone held a sharp object next to your major arteries.

With hair and beard trimmed and cleaned, Will left the bathroom, towel still around his waist. He entered the rest of the apartment and his brow furrowed when he couldn’t find Hannibal. Rounding the corner, he found Hannibal still in the kitchen, eyes firmly on the two glasses of alcohol that Will had fetched for him earlier.

Hannibal's lips were pursed and Will knew he was lost deep in thought. About last night most likely. A lovely chat? That was what Hannibal had said, wasn't it? So, why didn't Will remember the conversation? It had clearly happened. The glasses were proof enough of that.

Maybe Will had just been so drugged that he didn't remember. Maybe it was better if he didn't remember, because whatever they had discussed seemed to have Hannibal captivated and Will wasn't sure he wanted to know what was said between them. Will knew his mouth would just spout out any words that came to his mind after a few drinks and knew that he had no filter late at night... What had he said?

Will cleared his throat and Hannibal's head turned in his direction, Hannibal's dead-yet-illuminated eyes holding the same inscrutable expression they had been while on the cups. His eyes trailed over Will's body and Will didn't feel nearly as exposed as he thought he probably should have. He had never even been this comfortable around Molly.

"Hannibal, where would my clothes be?" Will asked into the silence. It seemed to take a moment or two for the words to be processed, but Hannibal left the kitchen, leading Will towards a door next to the bedroom he had woken in earlier. Hannibal opened the door and Will stepped in, looking around the room.

It was much like the main living area in its decoration. Modern, cold and hard. Nothing like the room that Will had woken up in with its altered architecture. There was a bed and a dresser beside it. On the dresser were all manners of medical equipment including IV drips. It made sense that Will would have had to be on such things, but it made him curious how Hannibal had come about finding them.

Will turned to thank Hannibal, but found the man had returned to the kitchen, finally emptying the cups into the sink with a hint of distaste at wasting the alcohol. Will entered the bedroom and closed the door behind him, leaving Hannibal alone in the kitchen.

Hannibal pulled a dish towel to himself and began drying Will's glass, a knot in his stomach he was certain was not from the bullet he had received.

Hannibal had expected that Will would not recall all of the details from the night before, but he had hoped that Will would remember some of it. And maybe, on a subconscious level, Will did remember. Will had quoted Hannibal right back to him, but it wasn't enough. It would never be enough. But Hannibal knew better than to push Will, especially during this moment in time.

Will was fragile. He had always been fragile, but this was glass that was already shattered and frozen in freefall before it had a chance to fully come apart. Hannibal could either fix that, tape it all back together so the paine was still in place, or let it all crumble apart. And he had promised that the latter would not happen.

Hannibal finished putting the now dry dishes away and paused, taking in the time that had passed. He glanced towards Will's closed bedroom door and made his way over to it with long strides. A hand took the door handle and he knocked as he pushed the door open.

"Will," he called gently. "Is everything ok?"

Hannibal glanced around the door to see a tidied up, frustrated looking Will with a pair of jeans on and a button up shirt balled up in a fist. Will's head snapped up at the intrusion and he gave a sigh. Hannibal didn't need to be asked to know what Will needed. Will didn't have to utter a single word. They had grown close enough that they could read the other's expressions, and Will's was on the verge of angry tears.

Hannibal stepped into the room and made his way over to Will who threw the shirt down onto the bed and lowered himself onto the edge, head in his hands. Hannibal sat beside him and carefully reached out a single hand, testing the waters.

His fingers grasped onto Will's bare shoulder and when the man didn't flinch or pull away, Hannibal continued his work.

"Will," he commanded softly. "Let me look at your stitches."

Will sat up fully with Hannibal's help and let Hannibal's fingers poke and prod at him. It was uncomfortable, but nothing that Will hadn't been through before.

"They look good," Hannibal muttered, leaning closer to Will until Will could smell the cologne on the man. Something that made Will's heart beat faster without reason, or none that Will could place. Will knew the scent. It was Hannibal through and through. The same smell that greeted Will each time he had gone to a session. The same smell that Will had been left with when he was gutted. The same smell that Will had woken up to that morning in a room that now occurred to him was not his own. "We just need to work on getting your movement back."

"Why was I in your bed, Dr. Lecter?" Will questioned, unsure if first names were quite appropriate. Hannibal slowly sat up, avoiding Will's gaze.

"A condition of last night's conversation." His voice was firm and final as if telling Will not to challenge him. "I would not put much thought to it. Now, let me work on your shoulder. You must be sore."

Will's head struggled to wrap around the information given to him as Hannibal's hands easily contorted him into a different position and fingers began to dig into the tissue of his shoulder. Will groaned in pain and pulled from Hannibal's grasp, facing Hannibal head on.

"What happened last night?" he demanded, anxiety plaguing his chest with how he didn't even have a clouded memory of their supposed conversation. Hannibal's beguiling eyes flickered over Will's face as if he was trying to decide what to tell Will.

The corner of his lip tipped upwards in a sad smile. "Nothing of consequence, I assure you. Please put it from your mind."

The answer only pissed Will off more. "Hannibal, do not play these games with me, please!" Will begged, a hand reaching out and taking hold of Hannibal's arm to ground himself in reality. "Not now. Not when I need you." Will sighed and lowered his eyes to his lap. "Please tell me what happened."

"If you so insist," Hannibal finally said with a deep breath, cooling some of the fire that was in Will's chest. Will looked back up to Hannibal whose smile had dropped. "Please forgive me if this comes off as presumptuous, but I would much rather show you than try to explain it with words that are currently alluding me."

“Ok,” Will agreed in a whisper, head tipped to the side in question, afraid just of what Hannibal was about to show him. Hannibal had shown him so much before, way more than Will ever needed to see. Hannibal had shattered him and put him back together far too many times for Will to count and Will wasn’t sure he could be put back together this time if he was pulled too far into the dark.

The familiar grasp of Hannibal’s hand on the side of Will’s face sent a stab of panic through Will, nearly afraid that he would meet the same fate as he had back in Hannibal’s house years before that he would forever be scarred from.

Hannibal leaned in closer to Will and all feelings left him as lips pressed against his. Soft, light and chaste. Hannibal quickly pulled back as if anything more would be constructed as rude. He cleared his throat and made himself busy with finding Will’s discarded shirt and shaking it out so it wasn’t balled up any longer.

Will blinked several times, mouth open as he breathed. He wasn’t sure what to do with that. What was he supposed to do with that? And with drinks and drugs, what had happened last night? How far had they gone?

Will’s fingers went to his neck, feeling at the bruised skin that was there. He had figured the bruising was left from an injury of the fall, but now he wasn’t so sure. Now he was curious how close he had let the serial killer before him get.

“Dr. Lecter,” Will finally got out. “Did you kiss me last night?”

“Difficult to avoid.”

Will watched as uncertain hands tried to press out wrinkles in his shirt. His heart rushed in his ears as he tried to somehow recall the event. It was a natural step in their relationship, if Will was being honest with himself. And he supposed that he had suspicions that Hannibal had some sort of emotional attachment to him, something stronger than client and doctor and friends.

Could he daily feel a stab of hunger for you and find nourishment at the very sight of you? Yes.

“Did I kiss you back?”

“Yes.”

But do you ache for him?

“Do you love me?”

The answer wasn’t as quickly spoken this time. Will could see Hannibal swallow before turning to face Will with kind eyes and another one of his sad half smiles. “Yes,” he muttered, voice rough and thick.

But do you ache for him?

The words assaulted Will’s mind, playing over and over on repeat, making him blink as he tried to push the words away.

...do you ache for him? ...ache for him? But do you ache for him? ...ache... ache... do you ache for him?

“I ache for you,” Will said softly, unsure if the words had truly come from his mouth or if they were just in his head. It wasn’t often that Will caused a surprised expression to plaster across the doctor’s face, but Hannibal’s eyes widened at the admittance and Will could feel a flush bloom across his cheeks. "I'm not saying it's a logical feeling, but..." Will trailed off, arm coming up to mess up his curls, but he groaned, arm unable to move up high enough. A sharp pain and a settling dull ache entered his shoulder and his other hand covered the bruised stitching, pushing at it in hopes it would alleviate some of the discomfort.

"Will," Hannibal said and Will glanced over to see Hannibal look at a loss for words. A man who normally knew how all of his sentences were going to end, unable to form any more of it.

"Yes?"

The space between them was thick as blue met maroon. Will waited for Hannibal to speak, but no words were coming. It wasn't often that Will could make Hannibal fall quiet. It wasn't often that Will could make Hannibal do anything at all.

And Hannibal was always so careful, his human suit ever on and perfectly kept. But maybe Will had pushed under the suit or maybe Hannibal had decided that he didn't need to hide behind it any more. He didn't have to be perfect all of the time. Not when it was just the two of them.

The thought sounded nice to Will. Just the two of them. It sounded domestic even. Almost as if Will weren't married with a kid who probably had no idea where he had gone, if he was alive or dead.

God, Molly. What had he done to her? If it really was two months, then they had been wondering what had become of him after the transport was attacked. He hadn't contacted them and Hannibal was free. They probably thought the worst. Hannibal had killed him. But then again, they might as well be dead. That was what was best for the two of them.

"I hunger for you."

The words were bared in the small space between them. Will blinked and took in Hannibal's expression. Was there fear in his eyes? Will couldn't recall ever seeing the man afraid, but then again, the man had never been quite so open with Will. The suit was being peeled back slowly, a corner of Hannibal's true person peeking out.

The small piece was something shy, Will placed. He was waiting for Hannibal to make a move, to be in control just as he always was, but Hannibal didn't so much as inch forward. Maybe he was restraining himself. That was more like Hannibal. Perfect restraint and control with every move planned ahead several steps.

"Can I..." Will trailed off, the words soft but seeming to echo in the bedroom. He licked at his lips, unsure if his heart could beat any faster.

They had kissed last night. This wasn't their first time, but Will felt like it would be out of place to not ask for permission. Will wasn't one to act first and ask for forgiveness later. He liked the open doorway that permission gave him. He wasn't rude or out of place.

"Yes," Hannibal whispered, granting Will the approval he had been waiting for.

Will lifted a hand and he cursed how it trembled. He had never reached out to Hannibal himself. Hannibal always initiated the contact. The hand shakes, the hugs, the undressing with his eyes. The first time he had ever reached out for Hannibal was the hug that he had used to throw them off the cliff.

Will had never thought of himself as suicidal, and although he had picked their downward path, it was a necessary one. He liked what they had become. He hadn't lied. It was beautiful. And they could do great things together if Will would give into Hannibal. Great and terrible. And Will couldn't let that happen. And so, he had decided to take both of them out of the world because he knew that if one of them died, the other couldn't live much longer. They were too tangled. Too conjoined.

Hannibal leaned into Will's gentle caress at his cheek, eyes sliding closed. He had to be careful, play the game right. The small voice was pushed down once more, not being allowed to speak now that nightmares weren't recently present.

And he didn't want to push Will. His mind was brittle, delicate. His memory was flammable and would go up in smoke if Hannibal tried to force him to remember.

And above all, Hannibal wasn't sure if he could go through Will forgetting again. The painkillers were one thing, but Will should have shadowed memories, not lost time. Hannibal didn't need or want Will to lose time anymore.

And maybe Will wouldn't lose time anymore. Last night had been the first time Will had called him by name without having to be reminded what it was. It had driven Hannibal a bit mad.

The last two months had been hard enough as it was. Hannibal had let himself feel far too much, get far too close to his counterpart. It was so dangerous, these stupid feelings swirling inside of him.

It was like he was a child again with his first crush. A crush that ended up being crushed. Windpipes unable to move air through them anymore. Hannibal hadn't meant to kill her. She was just... Difficult. Wouldn't dance in the play he was staging like she was supposed to. So he cut her strings so she couldn't dance at all. If she wouldn't dance for him like a good puppet would, then there was no use for her.

Will's lips were warm as they pressed against Hannibal's, eliciting a small sigh from the killer that he didn't give permission to leave him. A flush rode to his cheeks in his embarrassment. He had never just let himself feel before. He had never let himself be open. Not like this and not for someone as deadly as himself.

It was horrifying and made his blood rush and he wondered if this was how the pigs he removed from the world felt while he was working on his masterpieces that made more use of the person than they had been in life.

Will pulled back and licked at his lips. The kiss was nice, but Hannibal wasn't nice. Hannibal was threatening and treacherous and risky. He was unhealthy in the most appetizing way.

"Hannibal," he whispered, causing Hannibal to open his eyes to find a blue gaze that would put the Primavera to shame. "Don't make me ask."

Hannibal smirked with a small huff of air and Will could feel the denial coming. "You have to tell me what you want, Will," Hannibal instructed, toying with the man in front of him.

There was the Hannibal that Will knew. The games and the strategies. The control and the tight grip that gave him everything he wanted.

The idea of saying what Will wanted out loud made his pulse race. He had never had to vocalize his wants out loud. He didn't have many, and the others were either able to read or guess exactly what he needed, and Will knew Hannibal was just the same. Hannibal knew exactly what Will wanted, but he had never given without taking and he wasn't about to start.

Hannibal's fingers pulled on one of Will's damp curls as he waited for Will to speak. "What do you want, Will?"

"You said you hunger for me?" Will questioned, swallowing at his embarrassment that threatened to turn his skin red. Hannibal hummed in answer, amber eyes flickering over Will's face. "Show me how you do?"

Hannibal gave another small hum as he leaned a little closer. "Is the bruising on your neck not enough to show you?" Will's breath jumped as Hannibal's hand gripped tightly at his throat. His hand was strong and the hold was firm, but not threatening.

It sparked something familiar in the back of his mind. Something that had to do with Hannibal's teeth on his skin. The danger in the actions and what they could mean and the exhilaration of letting himself trust that he was safe in Hannibal's grasp, even if his adrenaline was telling him to run.

"It's not enough," Will got out, voice thick. He couldn't stop the small breath that left him as the hand at his neck tightened, air not coming to him as easily now.

Hannibal's grip pulled Will forward and Hannibal leaned over so his lips were by Will's ear. "Are you afraid?" Hannibal asked softly. "Your pulse is racing."

Will shook his head in answer. "Stop teasing me, Hannibal," Will muttered. "Please." He knew what *please* would do to the man. Hannibal liked to be begged. He loved to be the one in charge and please was the best way to get Hannibal on your side.

I hunger for you.

Hunger was exactly what Hannibal showed him. Hannibal's lips were crushing, kissing at him as if Will was the very air Hannibal needed to live, while Will was struggling to get his back.

Teeth nipped at Will's bottom lip, pulling at it and making Will's head spin. Or maybe it was the pressure to his neck that was making the edges of his vision spotty.

The bite was sharp and Will could taste the faint hint of copper before Hannibal's tongue wiped it away.

"You taste as sweet as I imagined you would," Hannibal whispered against Will's now swollen lips. Will moaned as the words pushed into his body and made his insides squirm.

Will blinked several times as he tried to ground himself and found his hands clinging to Hannibal's arm like a life reserve. Hannibal placed another kiss to Will's lips and released him, letting the tense grip on his neck go. Hannibal looked over his hand and scolded himself.

He would have to be more careful with his play things. His grip had been too tight. He could have hurt his toy.

No. Will wasn't a toy. Will was Will and that was how he was going to stay. Hannibal would make sure of that. He just needed to keep himself in check.

With one more small kiss, Hannibal got to his feet, holding Will's shirt in his hands. He held out his hand and a dazed looking Will took it, allowing himself to be pulled to his feet.

Hannibal helped him put on his shirt, gentle around Will's shoulder and straightened the collar of the shirt before turning Will around to begin buttoning the fabric.

"Hannibal?" Will asked softly. "If I have been out for months, why are my stitches still in? I-I know you're the doctor, but I only had my stitches in my stomach for a week or two."

Hannibal finished his work with the shirt buttons before he met Will's gaze and caressed his face with a hand.

"You continued to rip at them," he explained. "They can be taken out today if you would like them to be. I was going to wait until tomorrow. I have to go out today, but there is always time for you."

Will gave a slightly confused expression as he tried to piece together all of the information that was given to him. Some of it he stored away to contemplate once this conversation was done.

"Where are you going?" Will asked, a sense of panic in his voice that Hannibal did not miss.

Hannibal's eyes hardened, but his face stayed gentle in its expression. "I will be fine," he assured, hand lowering from Will's face. "I simply need to do some shopping. I won't be long. Only an hour or two."

Will lowered his gaze to the floor. He didn't want Hannibal leaving and not just because he wanted Hannibal by his side continuously.

"What if they find you?" Will questioned, a hand rubbing at his lips as copper began to fill his mouth once more from the skin Hannibal had broken.

Hannibal watched Will's anxious movements for a moment longer before he took a step closer and pulled Will into a hug, hand petting down his curls that were mostly dry. "No one will find me. I'll be back before you know it."

"If you insist on going, I want to come." Will's voice was strong and Hannibal sighed.

He wouldn't be able to convince Will otherwise. “I would much rather you stay here and rest. We shouldn’t be overloading your senses and my kissing you was not in your favor,” Hannibal tried anyways. It really was better if Will stayed. Will would stay safe.

Will shook his head against Hannibal’s chest. “I want to come with you. We’re conjoined, remember?”

“So we are,” Hannibal relented, pulling Will a little tighter. He was going to have to make sure that he kept a careful eye on Will while they were out. They couldn’t risk anything and the two of them being together was far more dangerous than just the one of them. Not to mention that Freddie Lounds had been doing a marvelous job of keeping their story alive on Tattle-Crime even if the main news outlets hadn't. "Make sure you wear something warm. I don't want you catching a cold. And I have a hat for you to wear as well."

Hannibal released Will and gave him a half smile before leaving the room to get ready himself. Will stared after Hannibal for a moment or two before going back to the dresser to where he had seen socks earlier and he left his mind to begin to dig through the little information he had at his disposal.

It had been two months since the tumble into the Atlantic, but Will swore he could still feel the chill of the waves in his bones and the pain in his back from how he had landed. It must not have been as bad of a fall as he had imagined it to be, he was walking just fine now, though a bit stiff.

With socks in hand, Will took to his bed to begin working them onto his feet, head tipped to the side as he slipped further into his thoughts. He had been tearing at his stitches? How badly was he doing that to make it so that he still had them in? Was that even something that he could do while in a coma? Was it a coma? Hannibal hadn't been clear about it, but by Will's own lack of memories, he was making as many logical conclusions as he could.

And Hannibal had said he was on a diet of broths and yogurts. Also not entirely impossible if he had been awake. He wasn't sure if he could be on anything other than IVs if he was unconscious. Unless Hannibal had forced it down his throat like he had Abigail's ear, Will had to have been conscious at least for a little while. Was he so heavily drugged that he just couldn't recall the interactions? That was possible as well, but for a whole two months? There had to be something that he could pick out of that time. Anything.

Will got to his feet and went to the closet door, pulling it open with a natural swing to find several pairs of shoes stacked nicely at the bottom along with several nice coats that Will wouldn't have ever picked out for himself. Will snatched up a pair of boots and a jacket, returning to his bed to put the shoes on.

Will's head snapped up and towards the living room where the playing of the piano had begun to ring out, notes deep and dark. Something sad and tragic and old. The name popped into his head as Hannibal's voice reached out to him, humming instead of singing.

Dido's Lament.

Will couldn't stop his eyebrows from furrowing together in confusion and his movements stilling on his shoelaces. He was certain he had never heard the song before. Fairly certain that he didn't know what a Dido was. And more than certain that he had never once heard Hannibal play or sing.

He finished up his work and left the bedroom with the coat in his grasp, cautiously walking over to the piano with a faint feeling that Hannibal wouldn't like to be interrupted, though he was once again unsure where the inference came from.

Will waited patiently by Hannibal's side, watching as his fingers tackled both the black and white glistening keys that Will couldn't never dream of trying to understand.

Hannibal glanced up from where he was playing, his fingers and voice pausing in their notes and he could see Will wince. Hannibal gave a fond smile. "You didn't interrupt me," he informed the empath before beginning to song again. "Sing for me?"

Will snorted at the sudden suggestion and he looked around the room as if there would be another person there to save him, jacket now clutched to his chest. When he met Hannibal's eyes, he could see that it hadn't been a question or even a suggestion. It was a demand.

"No," Will said firmly, mouth suddenly very dry. Hannibal's eyebrows rose at the rejection. "Absolutely not." Will's lips curved into a nervous smile, unsure of what else to do. "I don't sing."

"I find your voice to be exceedingly pleasant," Hannibal commented, playing some more of the melody that would normally be sung over the aria.

"You've never heard me sing before." Will tried to think back to a time when Hannibal would have heard him sing, but came up blank like most of his memories at the moment.

"You used to sing along to the radio in the car," Hannibal explained. Will blinked several times. He didn't know that he did that, definitely not in the presence of another living soul. "Not loud. I doubt you even knew you were doing it."

"Even if you have heard me sing, I don't know the song and it's too high anyway," Will continued on in his fight. He really just wanted to go do the shopping. He wanted to go outside despite the grey cloud cover.

"Transposing is not a difficult thing to do, Will." The music stopped and Will watched as Hannibal looked over the keys for a moment before his hands moved to several different notes and once again picked up the baroque opera in a much lower key now.

Will sighed, eyes out of the window. He wasn't going to win this battle. Hannibal always won and Will was positive that Hannibal would keep playing the piece until Will had sung it and wouldn't take him to do the shopping until the song was fully played through and through.

"When I am laid," Will began softly, unsure where he was pulling the words for the gruesome song from. "Am laid in earth."

"Louder please," Hannibal supplied with a small nod of his head. "And please breathe correctly."

Will frowned and cleared his throat in the small break before repeating the opening lines once more with a bit more volume supplied to just make Hannibal happy. It was better to keep the man happy than be on the other side of his knife, though Will thought that if he weighed the two outcomes, refusing to sing a song probably wouldn't get him cut.

"Remember me," Will pressed on, fingers tapping on his arm uncomfortably. "Remember me, but ah..." The notes twisted and turned in an odd pattern that Will's voice seemed to maneuver with a sense of previous practice. He could remember no such practice though. "Forget my fate." The lines repeated several more times over and Will sighed when it was finally finished. "Can we go now?" he asked impatiently while Hannibal was finishing the outro of the song. "Please."

"Do not be rude, Will," Hannibal instructed, eyes firmly on the piano as fingers carried across the keys, finishing the depressing melody. "All good things to those who wait." Hannibal lowered his hands and gave Will a small smile. "Thank you for indulging me." He got to his feet and reached out to Will, who passed the jacket over and let Hannibal help him into the long winter coat. "You are no opera virtuoso, but your voice is far superior," Hannibal whispered in Will's ear, causing him to shiver. "Something much more innocent. Like the alter boys in Florence."

“Don’t lie to me, Dr. Lecter,” Will grumbled, pulling on the sleeves of the coat to make sure they weren’t bunched up with his long sleeved shirt underneath.

“I’m a doctor now?” Hannibal teased as he went to the kitchen where several things were waiting on the counter. “Will you always refer to me by my medical degree when you are displeased with me?”

“Only if it displeases you in return,” Will admitted before he could stop the words from coming from his mouth.

Hannibal’s lips twitched into a smile. “Maybe next time you could sing Mozart’s Alleluia for me.” Hannibal grabbed the items from the counter and wandered back towards the piano that Will was still standing beside.

Will frowned, once more seeming to be able to call the exact song to the forefront of his mind despite having never heard of the piece before. He wasn’t about to sing for him again. “I am not a castrato, Dr. Lecter. I would prefer not to be compared to one.”

Hannibal gave an understanding nod, not arguing that castration was no longer practiced, much to Will’s thankfulness. He held out a pair of black framed glasses and Will quickly pulled them to him, glad for something familiar, no matter how small. He put them on his nose and blinked as everything came into a sharper focus than it was. He didn’t miss much without them. They were more for reading, but they often helped with his migraines and he could feel one starting and was sure it would get worse the longer he argued with Hannibal.

Next, there was a cloth wrapped around the back of his neck and Hannibal went to work tying the scarf and tucking it into the winter coat before buttoning up the coat. And lastly was a hat that Hannibal positioned carefully, low over Will’s eyes to hide his face.

Hannibal followed suit, adding a pair of gloves to his rather charming outfit with a jacket of the same price range as what Will’s was. “Are you going to be warm enough in that?” Hannibal asked as he tied his own scarf around his neck.

Will licked his lips, the jab coming out naturally. “What are you? My mother?”

Hannibal’s eyes narrowed on Will as he straightened his lapels, words flat and frank. “How would you know what a mother is like, Will?”

Will’s eyes widened at the words that were shot back at him. Hannibal always had a comeback, always had to have the last word, and the last word would always sting. It cut deeply, something that Will had given to Hannibal in confidence used back at him. But Will had provoked Hannibal. Will knew what Hannibal was like. Will knew better than to poke a stick at the beast, but he still did it constantly. It was sometimes fun in all honesty, that was until it went this far and it made Will regret having picked the fight in the first place.

Will took a step back as Hannibal moved closer, but didn’t fight as Hannibal placed a kiss to his lips. It was soothing, as if trying to quell the fire in his chest from the words that were still swirling around his chest and damn the man that it worked. Like ice on a burn, it worked. It dulled the pain until Will couldn’t feel it anymore. And Will knew better. Knew all of this was wrong, so fucking wrong. But he couldn’t stop. Hannibal owned him.

“Let’s go. I called a cab,” Hannibal said after breaking the kiss. He went for a door that was next to the kitchen that Will had assumed was a pantry. Hannibal held the door open and waited for Will to pass through it before locking the door behind them.

Chapter End Notes

Dido’s Lament: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ou8A0g_jYyA

Mozart’s Alleluia: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Xyp-ysXGY8

Thanks again to my sister and my wonderful beta, @PitaGonzalezMe on twitter.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

> "I picked the knife for a reason. Do you recognize it?" Will held it out for the man to see, the blood glistening in the dark. "It's the one you used on her. It's fitting, isn't it?"
>
> The letters continued in a jagged line on his other arm. M I S C H A.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Losing You Terrifies Me

Will shivered in the winter cold, breath hanging deadly in the air as he walked with Hannibal through crowded New York streets. Hannibal's steps were quick and Will found himself breathless trying to keep up with the man and not get lost in the crowds.

He shoved his hands into his pockets as snow continued to fall, making the sidewalks slushy and the cuffs of his pants wet and in turn, him more cold. Will nearly ran past Hannibal in his effort to keep up as the taller man paused to look at the window of an antique shop. Will stumbled, breathing hard and stood next to Hannibal, trying to find what it was that had caught the killer's eye.

The window was cluttered with typewriters, tea sets that were missing pieces, clocks, some with shattered faces and stacks of old books. Will glanced over at Hannibal who's gaze looked like it was focused further into the shop. Will tried to see past their reflection on the glass and into the shop that looked cozy and haphazardly thrown together, items strewn about the room.

“I think we deserve a moment to warm up,” Hannibal muttered, taking Will’s hand in his and pulling him into the antique shop. The bell on the door rang, filling the small shop and making Will feel uncomfortable. He didn’t like that the door alerted there were customers. He would have rather that he could browse without being interrupted by the owner and slip out unnoticed if he didn’t find anything he liked. “Please look around,” Hannibal said as he pulled his gloves from his hands that had to be far warmer than Will’s frozen ones. “I will only be a moment.”

Will watched as Hannibal maneuvered through the small spaces there were to walk with the grace of a dancer. Will was sure that if he attempted to make the same path, he would knock something over and break it. By the looks of the contents of the shop, he wouldn’t have been able to afford whatever he did break.

Will stepped over to the bookshelf beside the window display, looking over the worn spines of the older books. His fingers trailed over the fabric of the books, pausing as his eyes caught on one. In gold, tarnished letters were scrawled across a burgundy fabric. *La Divina Commedia.*

Will pulled it from the shelf and brushed the dust from its cover that had the same cursive lettering with the same words on it. The writing almost reminded him of Hannibal’s script. He let the book fall open to find thick and aged paper that was uncut at the edges. The words that greeted him were in Italian just as the front was.

Will couldn’t read Italian, but he could pick out a few words here and there, just as he knew what the title of the book was. The Divine Comedy. European languages always had similar enough words that Will could pick and choose through them as he pleased, though he was much better at trying to read other languages than he was at trying to listen to them.

“Can I help you find something?” a voice asked somewhere behind Will, causing Will to jump and turn. An older gentleman that was dressed like Mr. Rogers with white hair and a slight hunch to his back wore a smile in greeting.

“I was just looking,” Will answered softly, closing the book.

The man gave a small nod, but stepped closer. “Ah, I see you’re a lover of the classics,” he commented, a shaky and bent finger pointed to the book still held in Will’s hands. “That one is a wonderful read, but I would suggest not using it as a bedtime story.”

Will’s lips quirked up in an awkward smile at the small joke, more out of politeness than anything else. Where was Hannibal? What was taking him so long?

“I was actually...” Will trailed off. What was he doing? He had a small idea of what he had wanted to do with the book, but now it seemed foolish. “I was getting it for a friend. He would appreciate it more than me, I’m afraid.”

“The man in the back?” the owner inquired, tipping his head to the side like a dog. Will gave a small nod. “He does seem the type, doesn’t he?”

“Excuse me?” Will asked, unsure what to make of the comment and looking behind the man for Hannibal to come and save him from the conversation.

“The Divine Comedy?” the man asked with a smile. “Your friend seems like he enjoys Dante. His accent I couldn’t quite place, though. It’s a bit muddled. I’m sure it's because he’s traveled so much. That tends to happen when people know more than one language.”

“I-I suppose,” Will muttered, a breath of relief coming from him as Hannibal rounded one of the many shelves of things in the shop. He gave an amused smile with bright eyes, obviously enjoying Will’s discomfort.

“Are you ready to go?” Hannibal asked, releasing Will from the hold the shop owner had on him. Will nodded and the shop owner hobbled away from Will. “Let me just pay for this and we can be on our way.”

Will followed the shop owner towards the front and went to stand beside Hannibal, huddling close into Hannibal’s side and receiving another entertained smile at his ineptness to handle social situations.

“Did you find something you wanted?” Hannibal asked softly, eyes on the book still in Will’s hand. Will’s cheeks turned red as the weight of the book came back to his chilled fingers. Will lifted the book up and placed it on the counter next to a wooden box that Hannibal had in his possession. Hannibal eyed the back of the book and its worn deep red cover that was missing the dust jacket.

Hannibal gave Will a kind smile and pulled his wallet from his pocket, digging through it for the cash that the shop owner had asked for. Will couldn’t help but watch Hannibal’s hands work, staring at the stack of bills that were in the leather case.

“I have some money from when my parents passed away,” Hannibal explained as he caught Will’s gaze on him.

“Some?” Will questioned with a light scoff.

“Not in present company,” Hannibal instructed, reminding Will of the social construct that discussing money in public was not appropriate. “We will discuss it later.”

Will nodded and was silent for the rest of the transaction, nodding in agreement at Hannibal’s *thank you*. Will took the bag that had his book in it and Hannibal led him from the shop with a hand at the small of his back.

The cold air assaulted Will’s face, making his cheeks go red and an immediate chill rush through his body. Hannibal sighed beside him, pushing the bag with the wooden box into Will’s hands.

“I told you to dress warm,” he said softly, pulling his gloves from his pockets. He held them out to Will who hesitantly took them and gratefully slipped them on, the fur lining caressing at his icy fingers. “Next time, you will listen to me, right?”

“It’s colder here than in Virginia,” Will muttered, wiggling his fingers in their new confinement. His eyes jumped back up to Hannibal and he watched with an open mouth as Hannibal pulled his coat from around himself. “I don’t need-”

“Nonsense,” Hannibal argued, straightening the light sweater and scarf he was wearing. He stepped behind Will and helped Will slip into the coat that was larger than his own, Hannibal’s warmth quickly sinking through the layers and into his skin. “We’re nearly to the farmer’s market and then we can get a cab back.”

Will nodded, handing Hannibal back the bag that belonged to him. “You know, you didn’t have to buy me this,” Will muttered, motioning to the bag in his hand. Hannibal took Will’s arm without a word and guided him through the crowd, further down the street and into a slightly stronger snow that was finally beginning to stick.

“You wanted it,” Hannibal offered. “And I have no issue with money.”

“You said your family left you some?” Will pressed, curiosity winning out and not allowing Will to wait until they got home.

Hannibal gave him a disapproving look, but indulged Will all the same. “When I was eight, my family was murdered.” Will’s brows furrowed as he let the words make a place in his mind that was strictly for Hannibal. His own little room in Will’s mind palace that was sparse and needed more to fill it. And he already knew the outlines of Hannibal’s past, but now he could add more to the file. “My sister and I hid for several days until the group caught up to us.”

“Group?” Will asked softly. He had always pictured a single assailant.

“There were six of them, if I recall right,” Hannibal answered with a nod. “It’s the one part of my life that I don’t fully recollect in vivid details.” They stopped at a parking lot that had been cleared for the farmer’s market. There were stalls of produce, mostly vegetables that were green and leafy, or items like potatoes. Will was impressed that there was so much for how cold the time of year was. Hannibal pulled him into the stalls that had people adding items to bags and baskets. “They killed my sister and fed her to me in a soup.”

Will grimaced at the idea, a distaste in his mouth at the idea and how traumatizing it was. But anything he could learn about Doctor Hannibal Lecter, he would take. Anything to help him understand the man under the monster.

“I was mute for a long while after that. It wasn’t until I was a teenager that I began to speak again,” Hannibal continued, stopping at a stall and looking at some of the produce, hands that were red from the cold, reaching out to pick some of it up. “I’m not sure what the motive for killing my family was.”

He set the item down and pulled Will along to another booth for him to look over. Will watched his face carefully, trying to figure out what Hannibal was thinking about. His past certainly, but he also wore the expression he always had on when he was thinking of what to prepare for a meal. Two trains of thought living together in his mind, both equally focused on.

“I would assume it was robbery. My father was a count, my mother a countess. We had extensive art collections in the castle as well as pure silver and gold trinkets and expensive first editions of books. It was all vastly medieval.” Hannibal pulled his wallet from his pocket and held out some money to a Asian looking woman who smiled and took the money, adding the greens to a bag before passing them over to Hannibal to take. Hannibal, with a hand to Will’s elbow, pushed him further through the crowds.

“You grew up in a castle?” Will questioned, looking over Hannibal for any hint of emotion, but he still looked just as determined on dinner as ever. Will gave a small laugh, calling Hannibal’s gaze to him. “No one grows up in castles.”

“It has been in my family for generations, since it was built in 1415,” Hannibal explained.

“I want to see it.” Will wasn’t sure where the notion had come from. He had found the Lecter’s estate that he thought was large, but it must have been a servant quarters or something of the sort that he had visited when he was in Lithuania.

Hannibal had stopped walking and Will glanced up to see a slightly pained expression creasing the older man’s forehead. Emotional pain was something Will didn’t see often from Hannibal. The night he had been gutted had been the first time and it was still as strange now as it was then.

“I’m afraid that is somewhere I would much rather leave to memories at this time,” Hannibal whispered, starting walking again towards another small venue. Will stumbled as he tried to keep up, legs growing tired now with all of the walking that he wasn’t used to. Hannibal bought a few more things, the bags held on his forearms instead of passing any of them to Will. “All of my family’s money was put into a trust. When I was eventually adopted by my aunt and uncle, they left me in their will as well when they both passed away. They had whisked me away to France and my uncle encouraged my art as a way of speaking when I didn’t have a voice. And they took me to see all sorts of things. That’s how I fell in love with Florence.”

“They sound like they were nice,” Will commented, letting himself be pulled from the farmer’s market now that Hannibal was happy with his groceries and led towards what looked like a small cafe, somewhere where Hannibal could get warm now that Will had stolen all of his clothing.

“They were very kind people. When they passed, the money went into a trust as well. One that I couldn’t access until I was 21,” Hannibal said as he held the door open for Will to enter the small building. The warmth of the cafe let Will inhale deeply for a breath he hadn’t realized he had been missing. He pulled off his gloves and shoved them into Hannibal’s coat pocket before pulling Hannibal’s coat off and handing it back to Hannibal who was, still with a never missing touch, shepherding Will towards a booth. Will took a seat and Hannibal set the bags down in the booth beside Will. “I’ll be back in a moment. And do not look in my bag.”

With that, Hannibal went to the counter to order and Will glanced curiously over the bag from the antique shop that Hannibal had placed beside him. It was tempting to disobey Hannibal’s orders. He hadn’t been too horribly intrigued with the item that Hannibal had purchased, but with the looming expectation of his obedience, Will wanted nothing more than to investigate.

Luckily, Hannibal returned and took his seat on the opposite side of the booth, hands clasped on the table top, eyes as warm looking as the cafe they sat in. “You didn’t look, did you?” There was a hint of teasing in his tone.

“No,” Will answered with a small smile of his own, this conversation much more pleasant than their earlier conversation before they left the apartment had been. “And what did you do after your aunt and uncle passed?”

“I went to school. From a young age my father had been teaching me everything he could. Languages, maths, sciences. And I read every book I could get my hands on. Old texts passed down in my family, classics. I found myself mostly entertained by the tragedies of old. Shakespeare was a fond pastime until I could fully read in other languages. Stories should always be enjoyed in their original texts.”

Will’s hand instinctively touched the bag that held the book in it, the hint of a smile coming to his face. Maybe he had succeeded in picking something that Hannibal would like.

“I graduated early and was the youngest person accepted into medical school in France.” Hannibal paused as a young waitress, who looked like she was just barely scraping by to pay bills, came to their table, placing two cups of coffee onto the tabletop. Hannibal gave her a smile that he saved for when he was dealing with anyone in customer service. “Thank you.”

She nodded and let them be. Hannibal took his cup and smelled at it as he always seemed to do, before taking a sip. Will followed, the cup warm in his hands and he could only imagine that the warmth was defrosting Hannibal’s fingers.

“Are you bragging to me, Dr. Lecter?” Will asked in a low voice with a smirk, setting his coffee back down.

Hannibal gave a soft chuckle. “Not at all. You wanted to know.” His face became more serious. “Are you wanting to know more? It might make you hate me more than you already do.”

Will frowned at the idea. He wasn’t sure what came next in Hannibal’s life, but he wanted to know. This man was so wrapped in mystery and now that he was opening himself up to Will, Will wanted to take all he could, just as Hannibal always took. It was Will’s turn and Hannibal’s to give. Quid pro quo. It was a motto that Hannibal lived by and now Will was going to cash his chips and get what he was owed.

“I want to know. How did you end up in Baltimore?” Will asked with a small nod. “I know what getting into your mind entails.”

“Very well.” Hannibal took another sip of his drink and licked at his lips before he took a deep breath, eyes firm on Will’s. “I ran across my family’s killers.”

“Oh,” Will whispered, hands stretching out across the table top, eyes on the wooden grains. “I’m assuming that each one was met with the same fate as your family?”

“The one that fed me my sister was a special case,” Hannibal acknowledged in a low voice. “Her name will forever be carved into his skin. He better remember it, the monster.” Hannibal rubbed a hand over his mouth with an angry breath through his nose, eyes alight and terrifying.

Will tipped his head to the side at the words, reaching out and taking Hannibal’s other hand in his with a gentle squeeze. Hannibal’s eyes flickered from their hands and up to his face, softening at Will’s concerned look.

Damn his empathy. Hannibal was the real monster here, not that what those men did was justified in any way. Will was sure they deserved exactly whatever Hannibal had decided to deal them, but for Hannibal to think of someone else as a monster and not himself was an interesting concept. But anything could be rationalized away.

And he understood the anger. He understood what it felt like to want revenge for something that was cruelly ripped away from you. Abigail was one of those things. He could forgive Hannibal for a lot, it was in Will’s nature, but Abigail would never be one of them.

Will closed his eyes, letting himself slip into Hannibal’s memories, recreating them. In his mind, a pendulum swung in darkness. He waited until the pendulum was still, the hustle and bustle and hum of his own identity and emotions now quieted.

Eyes opened and a Parisian night greeted him. The city was bright with lights and tourists chattered as they walked about, out much later than was normal for the locals. At the end of the street was a man, one familiar and afraid.

"He knows who I am," Will said as he keeps his pace steady enough not to lose the man in the mazes of twisting streets. "He recognizes my face, though I'm older now." The man continued to glance over his shoulder and at Will's quickening steps, he broke into a run. "He doesn't know these streets like I do."

Will dashed after the man and turned down the more deserted alley that the past phantom had mistakenly chosen. He wouldn't have many more turns before he would find himself at a dead end.

"I've waited too long for this moment," Will panted as he willed his feet to move faster, carrying him in a sprint now. "I've planned this for years and I will not let him get away."

Will turned what he knew was a final corner to where the large and towering apartments would have created a blockade, much to the man's chagrin. Will pulled a knife from his pocket and flicked it open with a half grin.

"He is afraid. Good. Maybe now he knows how my sister felt. How I felt." Will took a step forward, breathing hard from his run, but the adrenaline pumping through his veins kept him on his toes. He felt alive for the first time in years. There was finally something worth living for, even if just for a moment. "I attack first," Will continued, racing forward and colliding with the man, tackling him to the ground. "His head hits the pavement and leaves him dazed."

Will's hand pressed over the man's mouth, holding so tightly that he would leave bruises. He pinned the man's arms down with his knees as he sat on the man's chest, making him unable to move. The knife pressed into the man's cheek first and his eyes were wide as a cry filled the night.

"Shh," Will hushed with a toothy grin. "You didn't let my sister cry when you killed her. No noise now." Blood flowed dark in the moonlight as the knife made its first carving into the man's cheek. "M," Will hissed through his teeth, reveling as the man's eyes brimmed with tears as he stayed quiet. "I." The man whimpered as the knife pushed deeper than the first letter. " S. C."

Will's fingers were slick with blood, the knife slipping. But he wasn't done yet. He wouldn't be done until he knew exactly what was taken from him. He would know her name. It would be the only thing he would remember while he died in the middle of a Parisian street.

"H." Will's teeth gritted together as he struggled to make markings against the man's cheekbone. Another cry. "Shh," Will hushed once more, other hand caressing the man's hair back. "I promise it will only hurt as much as she did." The knife continued its dance over skin, eliciting liquid darkness to pool on the pavement. "A."

Next was his arm, at the wrist. Will twisted himself so he could grip the flailing limb and pin it down. The M came first. And then the I.

"He won't bleed out right away," Will said through clenched teeth, other hand taking hold of the man's throat and pressing down hard enough to make his vision blur, S, but not let him pass out. C. "I'm cutting across his vein, not down it." H. "He will live for another 10 to 15 minutes. Long enough for me to make sure he can feel everything I want to inflict without him able to move." A.

“I picked the knife for a reason. Do you recognize it?” Will held it out for the man to see, the blood glistening in the dark. “It's the one you used on her. It’s fitting, isn’t it?”

The letters continued in a jagged line on his other arm. M I S C H A.

“This has shaped me. A knife is personal. You have to be close. You have to want to injure and kill to use a knife. A gun is rude,” Will whispered, the man now too weak to be moving. Will got to his feet and walked around his prey, deciding what to do next. “A knife-”

“Will,” a sharp voice said, breaking up his thoughts. Will jumped, breathing hard, heart pounding in his chest as he blinked. His eyes flickered around the cafe, trying to ground himself and remember how he had gotten there. “Will,” the familiar voice said again. Will met maroon eyes and it all slammed back into him. His name was Will Graham, he was in a cafe on the north side of New York and he was with Hannibal. “We need to go.”

Will rubbed at his eyes under his glasses, with a small nod. “Why?” he got out as Hannibal pulled him from the booth and shoved several bags into his arms. Hannibal nodded behind him and Will turned to look out of the fogged window of the shop. A dark form stuck out against the heavy snowfall, bringing Will just as much anxiety now as he had whenever the man entered his classroom and dismissed his class early to pull him away to a crime scene, each one worse than the last. “Jack,” Will whispered.

Will’s hand was snatched up and Hannibal pulled him towards the front of the cafe as Jack Crawford wandered his way into the small coffee shop, stomping the snow from his feet at the door.

Will followed after Hannibal, past the counter where the barista gave a confused look as Hannibal pushed open the door to the kitchen. Will didn’t pay the girl much mind as she raced after them.

“Hey, you’re not allowed back there,” she called after them, surely calling Jack’s attention.

“Will, when we reach the street, run back towards the antique shop. There’s more people there. You’ll be safer,” Hannibal instructed, hand still holding tightly to the empath’s. “I will meet you at the shop.”

“You’re not going to kill-”

Hannibal cut Will off abruptly with a dark voice. “No.” He pushed open the back door and shoved Will out into the snow. “Now go.” Will gave a small nod, adjusting the bags of shopping on his arms as he went for the street.

Hannibal closed the door behind him and made his way back through the kitchen and to the cafe. He lifted the collar of his coat up to hide his face as best he could, but if he was seen then he was ready to run. He had wandered these streets enough to know where he was going and New York was a much more pleasant layout than either Paris or Venice were.

He passed by Jack who was yelling at the barista, badge out on the counter, demanding to know who the men that had quickly left were. Hannibal went back to the table, wiped at the table top with his sleeve swiftly before snatching up the two cups that they had been drinking from and taking them with him as he left the small cafe, leaving Jack’s shouting voice behind him. If Jack hadn’t noticed him, then there would be no evidence they were there. No fingerprints, no DNA. Nothing.

Hannibal dumped the two cups in a trash can as he walked down the street in the opposite direction of the shop he had told Will to go to, shoving his hands into his pockets. It wasn't long before he heard a door crash open behind himself, but he didn't turn around, just kept his steps steady into the billowing snow.

He just had to keep Jack away from Will. Will would be safe even if Hannibal wasn't there. He had given their apartment address and some spare cash to Will in the cab ride. Will would be fine. Will was always fine and Hannibal would be keeping his promise.

"Hey you!" Jack's booming voice called after Hannibal.

Hannibal continued to ignore the interaction until he could hear shouts of anger from people being pushed aside by Jack. He rounded the corner and as soon as he was clear, broke into a run down the road that wasn't quite as slick with snow as the sidewalks were.

"Dr. Lecter!" Jack shouted, voice closer than Hannibal thought it would be.

Hannibal gave a huff of air in annoyance as he shoved his way through a group of college girls that were huddled together to stay warm. Jack didn't give up. The man would outlive god. Hannibal had given it his best shot to be rid of the man, but Jack wasn't stupid. He didn't pull that glass shard from his neck. That had been the only reason he was still alive.

Hannibal pulled at the scarf as he ran, untangling it from his neck as his body grew warm from the effort he was putting forth. WIth the fabric now caught tightly in his fist, Hannibal turned yet another corner, the blaring of a horn and the screeching of brakes being slammed catching him off guard.

A sharp pain kicked into Hannibal's legs, knocking him from his feet and onto the hood of the car. A blinding heat pushed its way into his vision as his head slammed against the windshield.

The moment took an eternity. Before Hannibal had a chance to put much thought into what had happened, he was on his knees with a hand clutching a handful of his coat collar. He was pulled to his feet and greeted with a fist to his face. The impact was sharp and sent Hannibal falling back to the wet road.

"I have to say," Jack's voice said, the tone of it muffled as Hannibal's ears rang. "Dr. Hannibal Lecter was the last thing I thought I would see while on vacation."

Hannibal inhaled deeply, spitting blood from his mouth as he rose to his knees, eyes meeting a fuzzy FBI agent.

"A holiday does sound lovely," Hannibal commented, tongue flicking out to wipe at the blood that was training down his chin from a busted lip.

"Where's Will?" Jack questioned as he looked around.

"Dead."

Jack gave a hearty laugh that sent vapor into the air. "I saw both of you in the cafe. Where did he go?" Hannibal let a smile pull at his lips until his bloody teeth shone brightly. Jack's smile fell and he cursed. "You were the distraction."

“Clever,” Hannibal commented. “I don’t know why you need Will when your own perception skills are so sharp.”

Jack huffed with a small laugh and a shrug of his shoulders. Hannibal took the man in, eyes stopping at the gun that was held tightly at Jack’s side. Maybe this was his out. If he could move fast enough. The stiffness hadn’t rested into his muscles yet, though he knew he was going to be sore in a good hour's time from the wreck he had caused, whose driver looked more interested in what was going on than yelling about the damage to his car.

“Are you visiting family, Jack?” Hannibal questioned, letting the scarf loosen from his hand just slightly.

“Some of Bella’s family,” Jack supplied with a small nod. “How long until Will comes looking for you, Dr. Lecter?”

“I doubt he will.” Hannibal spit again, his blood mixing with the dirty snow around his knees. “He’s an obedient puppy, isn’t he Jack?” Another loosening of the scarf. “He will lick your shoes clean if you promise him clarity of mind.”

Jack frowned, shifting his stance slightly. “I’m sure he’s used to spending Christmas alone,” Jack taunted, making Hannibal scowl. “And I am sure he is better off without you.” Hannibal’s eyes sharpened on Jack, who was stepping a bit closer. “You know that he doesn’t feel for you, right? He’s an empath. It’s a mental disability. He doesn’t actually care.”

“Will and I might be used to a lonely holiday, but how will Jack Crawford feel during his first Christmas without his wife?” Hannibal could play this game. His tongue was sharp and barbed like the devil. It was a game he was used to playing at. “Am I right to assume that you haven’t decorated? That was something you would do together. The tree, the lights, the baking. The house doesn't smell the same, does it Jack?” He could see Jack’s gaze darken and he took another step closer, exactly what Hannibal needed. “There’s no music playing while cookies are being made.”

“Shut up!” Jack ordered, hand holding the gun raising.

Hannibal snatched up the other half of his scarf and wrapped it around Jack’s arm, pulling him forward and using his shoulder to leverage the gun from Jack’s grip. The gun clanked to the ground and Hannibal scooped it up before twisting Jack’s arm up and back. Jack groaned, but stayed still. It would be so easy to break his arm. Hannibal even considered doing it, going far enough as to push on Jack’s arm and pulling a painful cry from the FBI agent. It would buy him time, that was for sure.

With a deep breath, Hannibal shoved Jack forward and tumbling into the street, gun pointed at the man’s head as he took several steps backwards. “I would appreciate it if you didn’t follow me,” Hannibal said, stepping further back. “If the gun isn’t enough of a motivation, please think back fondly on our friendship.”

With those words, Hannibal turned away and raced up the street, turning back the way he had come, not stopping for a moment. He wasn’t sure if Jack would stay behind with his now lost scarf, but he didn’t care. He had the gun. He controlled the situation.

His legs carried him through twists and turns until he found himself in front of the antique shop where Will was waiting for him, hat no longer on his head, curls holding snowflakes in them. Any other time Hannibal would have stopped to appreciate the simple view, but he seized Will’s hand and yanked the man along.

“What happened to you?” Will asked as Hannibal pulled him into the street and through traffic where he watched as Hannibal tossed a gun into a mailbox. Will’s brow furrowed. “Hannibal, you’re bleeding.”

“We will worry about that when we get home. We can’t stay here,” Hannibal said, voice determined. “I promised to keep you safe and that is what I am going to do.“

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again to my sister and my wonderful beta, @PitaGonzalezMe on twitter.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

> “This is one fight I am not going to let you win because you know that I’m right.”
>
> “When do you ever let me win any fights?” Will rubbed at his face, fingers trailing over his new scar down his cheek.
>
> “Quite often unless you upset me.”
>
> “Have I upset you?”

Chapter Notes

> I put the translations at the end of the chapter. If you would rather them be up next to what Hannibal says, please let me know so I can make sure it's updated. Thanks!
>
> Vedrò con mio diletto: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CzF11RsxcWg
> Sebben Crudele: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cj64UzeprI4

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Losing You
Terrifies Me

Vivaldi poured from the small radio that Hannibal had turned on the moment that they had returned home. Will listened curiously as Hannibal explained the song to him.

"*Vedrò con mio diletto*," Hannibal said as he put the groceries onto the counter, any idea of dinner long forgotten. Will tipped his head to the side, taking in the beautiful words that he didn't understand. Will moved into the kitchen as a very light and high voice began to sing. He grabbed a dish towel and wet it in the sink before moving over to Hannibal.

"What does it mean?" Will asked, tipping Hannibal's face to look at him. He pressed the cloth to Hannibal's chin and began to clean the blood that had dried there. Will did his best not to put too much attention on the way that Hannibal's composure was cracking. Hannibal's hands that were normally stone steady were trembling and his breathing was erratic.

"I will see with joy," Hannibal replied, voice weak. "This is Polish singer Jakub Józef Orliński." Will blinked several times, trying to understand the jumble of syllables that were thrown at him.

“He is a countertenor.”

Will gave a nod as if he understood what that meant, anything to get Hannibal back to his steady self. It was unsettling how a man who could kill with total efficiency without his heart beat rising couldn’t process having seen Jack Crawford. But then again, Hannibal hadn’t explained what had happened and before Will could ask, Hannibal continued on.

“It’s from Vivaldi’s opera, Giustino.”

“How do you remember all of this?” Will questioned, moving from Hannibal’s split lip to his forehead. Hannibal winced as Will pressed the towel to his skin and Will frowned. “Sorry.”

“It’s in my mind palace,” Hannibal explained, letting Will take his cheek with one hand and hold him in place while he tried to clean the mess with the other. “Opera has always been very prominent in my life. My aunt would listen to it and sing while she cleaned the house on Sundays. She would teach me about each song that played and I remember the smile she wore one time when I recalled a song she had told me about when it came on the radio while we were out shopping. Ever since then I have stored all of that information away. A force of a very old habit than a need I’m afraid.”

“Are you going to tell me what happened?” Will asked, tossing the towel aside now that Hannibal’s face was clean.

“I got hit by a car. I’m alright.”

That would explain it. Will sighed, pulling his glasses off and putting them on the counter before glancing over Hannibal. The rip in his slacks, the limp in his walk, the unsteadiness of his actions and words. Getting hit with a car would shake anyone up and Will was just grateful that Hannibal didn’t look too badly shaken up from it.

“And Jack?”

“He is fine.”

Hannibal moved past Will and went for the bar. Will followed and watched as Hannibal poured a quivering glass of wine, nearly missing the glass all together. Will was at a loss of what to do exactly. Hannibal had always been so strong and now that he was cacking Will had to wonder if maybe the man had finally had enough. And Will wanted to help, but he wasn't’ sure what he could do or say that would be of any comfort. How did you comfort a man who wasn’t afraid of anything?

The song changed on the radio and Will stepped closer to Hannibal. Maybe conversation was just something the man needed. Maybe Will could use music to calm him? It was worth a shot.

This time a woman was singing, her vibrato pronounced strongly.

“What is this song?” Will asked, now beside Hannibal, watching as the man downed the glass of wine like a shot rather than thoughtfully sipping on the contents of the glass. Will winced at the action. Something was so wrong.

“*Sebben Crudele*,” Hannibal replied with a deep breath. “It’s from Caldara’s opera *La costanza in amor vince l'inganno,* though I’m not sure who is singing. I don’t recognize the voice.”

“And what were all of the random words you just spouted off to me?” Will questioned, trying to give Hannibal a kind smile.

“Faithfulness in love conquers treachery.” Hannibal gave a nod at the translation. “It’s Italian as was the previous song.”

“And how many languages do you know?” Will asked curiously, cautiously taking the glass from Hannibal’s hand and setting it atop the bar, pulling him back to the kitchen. “Help me put the food away,” he instructed gently.

“Lithuanian,” Hannibal began, letting himself be pulled back to the kitchen where their bags were still waiting on the counter to be dealt with. He quickly made himself busy, turning off the radio and pulling items from the bags and putting them in the fridge. “German, Danish, Swedish, English, French, Italian...” Hannibal trailed off and Will paused in his work to watch the man at the fridge who was lost in thought. “My aunt taught me a little Japanese, but I don’t know enough to call myself fluent.” Will opened his mouth once more to ask another question, but Hannibal’s eyes met his, eyes shielded over and no longer panicked, back to their average emotionlessness. “What did you see, Will?”

“What do you mean?” Will stepped over to the fridge and put the last of the produce away, letting Hannibal close the fridge.

“In the cafe,” Hannibal explained, a hand resting at the small of Will’s back so that Will couldn’t escape. “You went into your own head.” Will gave a nod. “And what did you see?” Will looked down to his shoes, licking at his lips. A hand at his chin forced him to look back up into deep amber eyes. His back pressed into the fridge as Hannibal stepped closer. “Did you kill Grutas? Chased him down and used a knife?”

Will gave a small nod. “It was his own knife, wasn’t it?”

Hannibal’s eyes flashed dangerously as he leaned in closer to Will. “Yes.”

“And did you start with his face?”

“Yes.”

“And then his wrists?”

Hannibal smirked at that. “Severed his .” Hannibal released his hold of Will and stepped back, towards the last two bags on the counter, the two from the antique shop. “Tell me Will, did you enjoy it?”

“Yes,” Will gasped out, wishing that the words coming from his mouth weren’t the truth. It was sick, it made Will want to run. There was something so wrong in his mind, but that was the part that Hannibal seemed to love. The broken, hurt, confused and manipulated part of him. The part of him that was most like Hannibal.

“I did too.”

Hannibal took the bag with the wooden box in it into his hand and went for his bedroom, only stopping when Will called after him.

“What happened next?”

Hannibal gave his full attention to Will, words calm and collected. “One stubborn detective knew it was me, but without enough evidence, they couldn’t do anything to me. The name was the only connection. No one knew who killed my family, only Chiyoh when I told her. The man she held captive was not who directly killed my sister. He was a groundskeeper who sold us out for money.” Hannibal licked at his lips, tongue playing with the intruding split for a moment before he pressed on in his story. “I couldn’t stay any longer. Not with the suspicion I was under. So, I came to America. My drawings helped me obtain a scholarship at John Hopkins. I worked in the ER while I studied to become a citizen. Passed the citizenship test, lost my first patient during a surgical procedure and left to study psychiatry. That is how I ended up in Baltimore.”

“Hannibal, why did losing the patient make you leave the ER?” Will asked, trying to gain any more information he could. As long as Hannibal was still willing to give, then Will was still more than ready to take. “Why did it bother you so much?”

Hannibal was silent for a moment and Will could see him weighing the question in his mind. It was obviously the first time he had ever been asked something of the sort. Maybe it wasn’t the first time, Will reasoned, but the first time from someone who knew more about Hannibal than anyone else ever could.

“He was a good man,” Hannibal finally replied, turning away from Will. Will raced after Hannibal.

“That’s it?” Will asked in disbelief. Was that all he was going to get? “You don’t kill good men?”

“I remove pests that do not benefit society. I do not enjoy the thought of taking innocent lives any more than the next person, I am sure.” Hannibal pushed open the door to his room and placed the box on top of his dresser before moving to his closet to find a change of clothes. “There are pigs and there are people and there are people who get in the way. Nothing more.”

“You knew him, didn’t you?” Will asked, standing in the doorway of the bedroom, unsure if it was safe enough to step into the room. Hannibal was calm and collected, but Will knew when he got on the man’s nerves and this was one of those times. He had to tread carefully. “You personally knew him.”

“Yes,” Hannibal agreed, pulling his sweater over his head and then his undershirt that looked damp from their time out in the weather. “He was one of my mentors while I was at John Hopkins. He would let me live with him from time to time when my money was tight, before I was 21.”

“I’m sorry Hannibal,” Will muttered, arms folded over his chest.

“Me too...” the man whispered, looking over the items he had laid out on the bed to wear. “Will, go get a change of clothes. We’ll take your stitches out and then we need to talk about what we’re going to do.”

Will wasn’t exactly sure what Hannibal was referring to, but Will gave a nod, leaving the room. He went to his room and gathered some dry lounge wear that was from his home? Did Hannibal really have time to stop at each of their respective homes? How had he done that without the police being all over those houses?

Will changed into the pants, warmer now that he was out of his snow damp clothes, leaving the shirt off as he left the room. He found Hannibal on the couch in the living room with a button up dress shirt on with the sleeves already rolled up to his elbows.

Will sat on the couch beside Hannibal, looking over the tools that were across the coffee table, glinting in the dull late afternoon light. Will watched as Hannibal pulled on a pair of latex gloves and reached for a pair of medical grade tweezers and thin scissors.

“Come lay across my lap Will,” Hannibal instructed. “It will be easier for me to work.”

Will swallowed and moved to do as he was told. Will could deal with a lot of things. He had seen a lot of things, but the idea of sharp objects close to his body made him want to run away, a callback to earlier stabbings and stitches.

“We’ll start with your face.”

Now with his head in Hannibal’s lap, Will’s eyes shut tightly and he turned his face and body so his stitches were upright for Hannibal to work. “Please,” Will muttered. “Be gentle.”

Hannibal stopped, unsure where the sentiment had come from. Will had had stitches removed before. He knew what to expect, so why was there a scent of fear in the air around him? “It shouldn’t hurt Will,” Hannibal said kindly.

“My other ones hurt. It felt like I was there for hours.”

Hannibal bit his tongue at Will’s admission. Removing stitches could be uncomfortable. One still had feelings where they were. There would be pressure and maybe some discomfort, but never pain if they were removed correctly.

“They didn’t do it right then,” Hannibal muttered, his accent nearly making it impossible for Will to understand him. “I promise this won’t hurt.” Will gave a small nod against Hannibal’s legs and Hannibal took it as permission to start. His tweezers picked at the first knot and pulled at it gently, creating enough space for him to cut the thread. He then pulled it free and felt Will immediately relax against him. “I keep my promises Will.”

“What would have made the others hurt?” Will asked, causing Hannibal to freeze at the movement of Will’s face.

“They might have pulled the stitching out the wrong way, pulling the knotting through,” Hannibal supplied, moving onto the next stitch. “It might have been a new nurse who was nervous or something of the sorts.” Hannibal made quick work of the stitches and leaned forward, placing a kiss to Will’s temple when he was finished. “That wasn’t so bad, was it?” he asked in a whisper in Will's ear. Will shook his head, enjoying the feeling of lips against his flushed skin. “Are you going to turn so that I can do the rest?”

Will’s eyes stayed closed as he shifted himself so that his chest was more accessible. His breath was stolen from his lungs as a kiss was pressed to his lips. Without a thought, Will kissed back, hand reaching up to grab at the hair at the base of Hannibal’s neck to pull him closer.

Hannibal pulled back and sat up with a satisfied twinge to his lips that made Will’s heart thud madly. His now free hand draped over his eyes, hoping that it would cover enough of his cheeks that Hannibal couldn’t see the color that was filling them.

Hannibal went to work on the stitching at his shoulder, following the same process. “Will, we need to talk.”

“About?” Will asked softly.

“I meant it when I said earlier that we couldn’t stay here. We need to move on. Jack is going to be searching each and every building in the whole of New York to find us.”

Will frowned. He hadn’t been here long, at least not long enough to remember anything, but he didn’t want to leave. The space was as familiar as a day could make Will feel. This was where he was safe. This was where Hannibal protected him when he couldn’t save himself. This was where words that had damned them were said in the open, begging that the other would understand.

“When?”

“As soon as possible,” Hannibal replied, his focus intense on his hands. “We can start packing tonight and leave by morning. I have another place already being paid for.”

“Where?” Will mumbled, feeling the small swirl of anxiety in his chest. He wasn’t sure why he was so attached to this place, but there was something in these walls that spoke to him deeply and he didn’t want to lose that.

“It’s a small cabin outside of the city. I’m sure you will enjoy it far more than living here.” Hannibal finished the last stitch and placed his tools back onto the coffee table, pulling off his gloves, but Will didn’t move. Hannibal took the opportunity to work on Will’s shoulder that Will hadn't let him do early. “There’s a stream you can go fishing in. I’m sure it's probably frozen over by now. It is mid-December.”

Will hissed as fingers pressed into his shoulder, a deep knotted pain there, the muscles arguing against the intrusion of the massage. But Will knew better than to fight Hannibal. The muscles needed to be worked and the tissues broken up so that he would be able to have full range again.

“Mid-December?” Will repeated through gritted teeth. “What’s the date?”

Hannibal hummed for a moment in thought, dragging another moan of pain from Will as he pushed at the stubborn knot under Will’s skin. “The 22nd, I believe.”

Will lifted his arm from over his eyes and looked over Hannibal’s face with his nose scrunched up. “The city wasn’t decorated, was it?”

Hannibal’s fingers halted and he blinked once before looking down at Will. “Every corner and shop,” Hannibal answered, his task forgotten. He pushed Will’s arm aside and placed a hand to Will’s forehead, causing Will to roll his eyes.

“I’m not sick,” Will muttered, pushing Hannibal’s hand away softly.

“You’re warm,” Hannibal pointed out with a frown. “You don’t remember the tree in the shop? You were standing right next to it. Or in the cafe? The barista had on a distasteful holiday sweater.”

Will sat up at that and grabbed his shirt, pulling it over his head and grumbling when he couldn’t get it any further. Hannibal didn’t hesitate to help Will pull the shirt on the rest of the way, though he was more than happy to notice that this was Will trying to avoid the question.

“I don’t remember it,” Will finally whispered, head lowering into his hands as he tried to push back into the memories of the day to only find them spotted and cloudy at the edges at best. He remembered the cab ride and the shop that absolutely didn’t have a Christmas Tree in it. He remembered the book and the weird wooden box. Hannibal giving Will his coat. He could recall in vivid details everything that Hannibal had told him about his past. The farmer’s market and then the cafe. Jack was there, but there definitely wasn’t anything holiday related to his surroundings. Maybe Hannibal was just wrong with the date. Maybe it was mid-November instead. “I really don’t remember.”

Hannibal bit at his bottom lip in thought before getting to his feet, using cleaning up his equipment as an excuse to go to his room. He dumped the things on his dresser and went to his desk, grabbing his black leather notebook, leafing through to an empty page and grabbing a pen to scribble down in it.

22, Dec.

Will is having a memory relapse just as he did when we first arrived. He is omitting details from his thoughts. Possible fever may be the cause. Will have to verify in the morning whether memories are still intact or if-

“Hannibal?” Will called from the other room. Hannibal stopped his writing and lowered his pen, closing the notebook at footsteps behind him. “What are you writing?” Hannibal turned just in time to see Will’s hand reaching out for the book. Hannibal snatched up his wrist and put himself between the two items.

“It’s just a journal. Private,” Hannibal explained. It wasn’t a lie. It just so happened to be a journal all about Will. Fragile little Will Graham. “Please do not concern yourself with it.” Will gave a small nod, eyes still firmly on the black book. Hannibal glanced around the room, trying to come up with something that would pull Will’s attention from the notebook. “What did you buy at the shop today? Can I see it?”

That seemed to work well enough. Will gave a nod with a small and warm grin, a real one that Hannibal didn’t think he showed the world nearly enough. Will was never as happy as Hannibal would want to see him, though Hannibal knew he was the reason for Will’s misery, but he couldn’t seem to let the man go. Hannibal was fairly certain that if he tried the little bird wouldn’t fly away from its cage anyway.

Hannibal watched as Will left the room and turned back to his writing, opening his notebook again, pen back in hand. He skimmed his interrupted thoughts before continuing.

-he has forgotten again. May try hypnosis to bring forth previous memories. No further working theories at this time.

Hannibal closed his notebook and pushed it back into its home on his desk before leaving his room himself and heading into the main room where Will was standing by the counter, book in hand, finger's gently caressing the page almost lovingly. His eyes left the page and flickered up to Hannibal for a moment before lowering back to the book, closing it.

Hannibal couldn't help the small amount of endearment that filled his chest at the nervous look on Will's face. Will was so eager to please. Always so willing to give the world away and Hannibal would be lying if he hadn't taken advantage of that aspect of Will with full knowledge.

"Maybe I should save this for Christmas. It is for you, after all," Will muttered, his voice small in the large apartment.

"An early present," Hannibal insisted, stepping closer. "It's not very kind to make someone buy their own gifts, Will."

Will's cheeks flushed, under the new scar, and he rubbed at the back of his neck with a sheepish expression. "I realized that I didn't have any money. Just the cab fare you gave me. I can pay you back."

"I wouldn't even think of such a thing." Hannibal made his way to the kitchen, hand outstretched towards Will. Will placed the book into Hannibal's hand and Hannibal took it, looking over the burgundy cover and swirling gold lettering. He hummed a note that Will couldn't exactly place, but he didn't look disappointed. "*La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri."*

Will could at least figure that sentence out and he smiled at how smoothly Hannibal said the words. He didn't know he could smile this much. There was just something so calming around this man. Despite everything between them, Will couldn't help it. He knew better. He knew the tragedy that awaited him if he stayed tangled up in this man, but nothing was coming to save him and he honestly didn't want to be saved.

"I might have gotten it for a selfish reason," Will admitted, a hand rubbing at the back of his neck. Hannibal was silent waiting for an answer, even though Will knew that Hannibal had already figured Will's reasoning. "Read it for me?"

"Are you wanting a translation?" Hannibal was now flipping through the first few pages to find where the first stanza began, catching Will shaking his head in answer.

"Stories should always be enjoyed in their original texts, shouldn't they?"

Hannibal inhaled as his own words were once again spouted at him. He blinked several times, unsure of what exactly to say back to Will. It still stunned him how often Will could do that to him, and only Will. He always had razors for everyone else on his tongue, but Will could silence him so easily. His eyes found the first line of the poem and he decided that reading would be the best solution to his loss for words.

"*Inferno: Canto I. Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita mi ritrovai per una selva oscura che' la diritta via era smarrita*," Hannibal started, making his way to the living room, Will following closely behind him.

Hannibal took a seat on the couch, crossing his legs comfortably, book in his lap. Will sat beside him and pushed the book up, leaving a small bit of shock in Hannibal's system as he laid his head across Hannibal's lap, eyes closed.

He was so much like a child, Hannibal noted as he let one of his hands play with Will's unruly curls. His other hand rested against Will's chest to help support the book, moving up and down with Will's breathing. He gave his trust too easily. He relaxed into a killer's grasp without a second thought when it would be so easy for Hannibal to end him. Suffocation would be the easiest, but the book was heavy. A corner would do some damage and bash in Will's head.

Hannibal pushed the thoughts away and continued to play with Will's hair, eyes now back on the words that he knew all too well from many years of rereading them.

"*Ahi quanto a dir qual era e` cosa dura esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte che nel pensier rinova la paura!*"

"No," Hannibal grumbled with an irritated sigh. Will laughed as Hannibal came up behind him, wrapping his arms around Will, taking his hands. "They have to be cut evenly or they won't cook right." Will's heart beat madly in his chest as Hannibal's chin rested on Will's shoulder, hand's guiding Will's. "You use your fingers as your guide. The blade of the knife goes against your knuckles." Will let the knife be pushed through the mushrooms, easily making the cuts even and equal. "See?" he asked softly, pressing a kiss against Will's neck. Will shivered and squirmed free of Hannibal's grip.

"I can't cook, Hannibal. You know this," Will said with a small chuckle as he tried once more to slice the mushrooms up thinly. "I don't know why you continue to insist that I help when anything I do will never compare."

Hannibal smiled at this, returning to his own preparation of the veal, making sure it was cut through and ready for when the filling would be ready to be added. Once finished, he glanced back at Will who was still messing with the mushrooms, knife hitting the cutting board with loud thuds. They would be here all night if Hannibal let Will do any more.

He went over to the ingredients that were beside Will and pulled a new knife from the block, taking an extra cutting board and the cloves of garlic. Will stopped his massacring of the mushrooms and watched in interest as Hannibal placed the blade flat against the garlic and used his palm to smash the garlic against the cutting board. He did the same with the second clove, pulled at the layers he didn't want and then went about finely mincing the garlic.

"The mushrooms, Will," Hannibal reminded as he moved onto the tomato that was still waiting to be cut up as well.

Will looked back down at his own cutting board that was a mess. "How did you learn to cook? My dad taught me how to read directions on packages." Will snorted at the memory. "Mac and cheese seems to be the only thing I can cook and get a compliment on. And that compliment was from my dad."

"It sounds like you and your father got along," Hannibal tossed out.

"When he wasn't drunk, he was pleasant enough to be around."

"It sounds like the reading directions on the back of packages was a survival trait rather than a bonding moment," Hannibal said, falling back into the normal chatter easily. "Do you resent him for that?"

Will gave a huff and lowered the knife to the cutting board, turning to look at Hannibal with a frown. “We’re not doing this,” he said, setting the boundaries that he had never set with Hannibal. “You’re not my therapist. You don’t get to examine my head anymore.”

Will was surprised at a nod from Hannibal in agreement. “You’re quite right. I’m sorry.” Will gave a small nod with a confused look before turning back to the mushrooms that were more mush than shrooms now. “I taught myself to cook,” Hannibal said, answering the earlier question. “It was a distraction while I tried to find where I should take my life next. Between surgery and psychiatry.”

“And what are we having tonight that I have completely butchered beyond hope?” Will asked, stepping away from the cutting board. It was better off if he watched Hannibal work than try to help. He would just be in the way.

“Spinach-stuffed Veal with Cumberland Sauce,” Hannibal explained. “A dinner that you declined to join.”

“I didn’t picture you as eating meals over again.” Will leaned against the counter, arms folded over his chest as he watched the master at work, getting butter melted in a pan before adding the beautiful and uniform garlic and the mushrooms that Will had worked on into the pan. “Just like I’ve never seen you wear the same suit twice.”

“I have favorites in both aspects.” Hannibal tossed the ingredients in the pan before setting it to cook, grabbing some salt and pepper and seasoning the food. “This happens to be one of them.”

“With veal or the other?”

Hannibal turned his back to Will, pulling spinach to him and washing it off in the sink. “Have you ever heard of William Seabrook, Will?” he simply asked.

Will tipped his head to the side, trying to recall the name to memory, but came up empty. “No,” he answered after a moment. “Who is he? Or was he?”

Hannibal smiled as he dried off the spinach with a towel. “He was before my time,” Hannibal explained. “I did not have the pleasure to dine with Seabrook, though we did share similar tastes.” Will gave a small nod to show he was listening when Hannibal glanced over at him. Hannibal went back to work, chopping the spinach up before moving back to the stove to flip the mushrooms once more. “He was a reporter for the New York Times, researching certain subjects for his book. A medical student friend procured for him human flesh, which he promptly cooked and ate.”

Will shifted uncomfortably at the idea. It still sat wrong with him, all of it. He couldn’t understand the want or like of eating such a thing, despite the fact that he was certain he had feasted on flesh just the same. It was only natural that he had whenever he had had any meals with Hannibal that he didn’t contribute the meat to.

Hannibal added the spinach and tomato to the pan, putting the cutting boards and used knives into the sink to be washed. Will’s eyes trailed over the man, the muscles in his arms as he scrubbed at the dishes. His shirt was still rolled up to his elbows, an apron around his waist, though Will doubted he would ever need it. His clothing was always spotless when Hannibal was done cooking.

“He compared it to veal. I have to say that the similarities are there, though I would juxtapose that it more similarly relates to pork than cattle.” Will watched as Hannibal got out another pan and placed it on another burner, turning the burner on and melting more butter in it before adding some breadcrumbs to the butter. “Come stir this for me Will.”

Will followed the instructions, taking the wooden spoon that Hannibal passed him and began to mix the butter and breadcrumbs together, watching as they slowly turned brown. He stepped aside as Hannibal added more salt and pepper to the mixture.

“I have to point something out to you Will,” Hannibal said as he stepped behind Will, a hand resting on one of Will’s hips as he nuzzled his face into his curls. “You are cooking without looking at a package.”

Will laughed. “I’m burning bread without a toaster is what I’m doing.”

“Will you add those to the other pan, please?” Hannibal pressed a kiss into his curls and went to get the veal. Will obeyed and stirred the crumbs into the spinach and mushroom. “Take that off the heat.” Will picked up the pan and turned off both of the burners before taking the pan over to where Hannibal was salting and peppering the veal. He placed the pan on a hot pad and stepped out of the way once more to watch him work.

“Do we have to pack after dinner?” Will asked softly, the thought having been stuck in his mind since Hannibal had said that was the plan.

“As much as you want to stay, we have to go,” Hannibal said as he began to put the mixture into the veal with skilled fingers. “This is one fight I am not going to let you win because you know that I’m right.”

“When do you ever let me win any fights?” Will rubbed at his face, fingers trailing over his new scar down his cheek.

“Quite often unless you upset me.”

“Have I upset you?”

“No,” Hannibal said simply. “We can come back here someday, but it's not safe now.”

“Being on the run isn’t quite as fun as they make it seem in the movies,” Will grumbled, fingers now finding the scar that was across his forehead. Hannibal gave a nod.

“You will get used to it after a while.”

There was a sadness in his voice that Will couldn’t exactly place and Will couldn’t help but think that the words said were more trying to convince Hannibal than they were Will. Maybe someone could never get used to constantly moving, never having roots anywhere to hold yourself in place. But Hannibal had picked this life. He made the conscious choices to do what he did and he had to deal with the consequences it provided, and now Will was strung along.

It was self-defense, Will could play that card just fine. It wasn’t a lie, but he liked what had happened. The pain was sweet and the blood was warm. The adrenaline was a drug and he felt like he understood why people would jump from planes or cliffs or waterfalls... There was a lot of jumping from high places, Will realized. He didn’t understand the height fetish people had. Falling from that cliff had done more to solidify Will’s fear of heights.

That didn't change the fact that killing was the sweetest high he had ever lived through. There was something in holding a person's life in your hands. And maybe that was why Hannibal had gone into the medical practice. Surgeon was number five on the list. History had been riddled with Angels of Death, not that that was what Hannibal was. Hannibal defied classification, just as Will knew the serial killer wanted to.

Hannibal showed some characteristics of a psychopath, but narcissism and occasional impairment of remorse and empathy was not enough to stick him into that filing cabinet either. Hannibal did have empathy when he wanted to, but it was an empathy

Hannibal wasn't a sociopath. Will knew he was more classified in that category with where he landed on the scale. Being introverted didn't make you suffer from ASPD, but that seemed more likely than the latter.

Maybe it was a strange mix of PTSD and OCD that had become a deadly cocktail in Hannibal's mind. All of his actions seemed to stem from his sister's death. Or maybe it was Wendigo Psychosis. Will shook his head at the thought. That wasn't right. Hannibal didn't crave human flesh, he just enjoyed it. He didn't need it.

It had to be ASPD spurred on by PTSD. And he didn't have all of the symptoms of ASPD, but the main ones where there, able to be turned on and off at a moment's notice depending on the person suit Hannibal was attempting to put forward.

Hannibal put the meat in the oven and wiped his hands off on his apron before untying it and putting it away. His eyes fell on a silent Will who was chewing on his lip, eyes on the floor, lost deeply in thought.

Hannibal stepped over to him, hands taking his hips, but Will didn't acknowledge the touch. "Come back to me, Will," Hannibal whispered, resting his head against Will's. It was happening again and Hannibal wasn't sure he could go through another boxing match with Will's mind and win again. It was painful to keep his composure when Will forgot. Today had been a good day, better than most, but Hannibal didn't want to lose it. He didn't want Will to lose it and it always started with missing details and blackouts before the reset. "Will, don't retreat to your mind," Hannibal pushed again. "Please." Maybe he should have let Jack find them. Jack could have gotten Will the real medical help that they needed, more than what Hannibal could give him. "Will Graham. Come back to me."

"Hannibal?" Will muttered with a deep breath. Hannibal leaned back enough to look over Will's face. There was a deep etched confusion on his face and Hannibal held back the angry tears that wanted to fall. Will wouldn't remember tomorrow. "I'm sorry. I was thinking."

"About?" Hannibal asked, head leaning back against Will, wishing he could find what was damaging Will. But he would pretend everything was normal, as normal as it ever was.

"You."

"Me?" Hannibal asked with an amused tone that Will found to be a little on the fake side, but he pushed it away.

"What you are," Will explained.

“Ah,” Hannibal said with a nod, releasing his hold on Will and stepping away from him. “And your conclusion?” Hannibal made himself busy with beginning to wash the dishes that they had dirtied.

“ASPD?” Will tried, making his way to Hannibal’s side to dry what Hannibal had finished washing. Will watched as Hannibal chewed on the words, head tipping from side to side as he mused.

“And what brings you to that finding?”

Will took the pan from Hannibal and ran a towel around the inside of it. “You do have a majority of the characteristics that go with it. Disregard for right and wrong, exploiting others by lying, being cynical of others.”

“I do not think I embody arrogance.” Hannibal passed over the second pan, eyes following Will’s body and the way the muscles in his arms moved as he worked.

“But you constantly have problems with the law,” Will agreed, pushing another symptom out into the open. “Uh, intimidating, hostility, aggression and violence. A lack of empathy and remorse about harming others.”

“I do not have a lack of empathy,” Hannibal disagreed, handing Will the wooden spoon before turning off the sink and drying it hands on a towel before folding the towel back up and setting it back on the countertop.

“Ok, you have the ability to pick and choose your empathy,” Will agreed, taking all of the dishes to be put away.

“And I do not take risks unnecessarily. I take into account all of my choices and their outcomes and I was not irresponsible with my work and obligations.” Hannibal gave a shrug, obviously objecting the diagnosis that Will was giving him. “I do not have ASPD.”

“You’re forgetting the most damning part,” Will continued on, putting the frying pans into a cabinet that he found easily as if he had used it a million times before despite not even having seen Hannibal pull out the pans. He pushed the repeating feeling of *déja vú*. “And there is no way that you can fight me on this part.”

“And what would that be?”

“Using charm to manipulate others for personal gain or pleasure...” Will’s voice went soft towards the end and Hannibal folded his arms over his chest, enjoying the blush that had been fevering Will’s cheeks almost all day. Will cleared his throat and tried to leave the kitchen, but Hannibal quickly snatched his hand and pulled him back, only deepening the red on across his face.

“Are you saying that I’m charming?” Hannibal asked in a low voice, pulling Will in closely until Will was knocked off balance and landed with hands against Hannibal’s chest, effectively wrinkling his otherwise perfectly pressed dress shirt.

“What was that about not being arrogant?” Will challenged right back. Hannibal’s half smile and arms that now had a firm grasp on his waist made Will’s pulse race. Hannibal was quiet, waiting for Will to fill the silence between them. “Do you have to pretend like you’re not charming? Or witty?” Will asked, hands now fists in Hannibal’s dress shirt. “Do you have to pretend like you’re not perfect?”

Hannibal's half smile dropped at the words. "You put me on a pedestal that I do not deserve," he muttered, leaning down to capture Will's lips in a tender kiss. "I can promise you that I am the furthest thing from perfect."

"Stop that," Will whispered, eyes looking glassy.

"Stop what?"

"Being so human."

Hannibal's lips pursed and he gave a pronounced sigh. "As much as I would love to be anything else, I am only what I am. That doesn't disappoint you, does it?"

Will shook his head in answer. "I told you you're perfect, human, devil or monster." Will's hand took Hannibal's cheek, thumb caressing the sharpness of his cheekbones. "We'll be damned together." Will's fingers dropped, trailing the cupid's bow of Hannibal's lips, inciting a sharp inhale from the killer. "Does your pulse race like mine does?"

"Only around you," Hannibal admitted, hand taking the back of Will's head and pulling him even closer until their breathing melded together.

"Show me."

"We have twenty minutes until dinner needs attention," Hannibal muttered, eyes closing as Will's calloused fingers continued to trail over his lips. His tongue slipped out, tasting the salt from Will's skin, prompting a moan from Will.

"Are you bragging again, Dr. Lecter?" Will teased, breath heavy, eyes wide like a doe's, making Hannibal hungry.

"*Aš ketinu praryti jus visus, jei nesate atsargus, Will,"* Hannibal warned darkly, leaving Will only guessing what he was saying, not that he cared. Any language Hannibal wanted to speak would make Will melt and his knees go weak. "*Negundyk manęs.*"

"Kiss me," Will ordered, voice desperate in its whine.

Hannibal's fingers tightened in Will's hair and tugged the man's head back, kissing him fervently. Will kissed him back, hands making quick work of Hannibal's shirt, pulling it free from his slacks and unbuttoning it with hurried fingers. Hannibal released his grip on Will long enough to let Will rip his dress shirt from his shoulders and toss it gracelessly to the kitchen floor.

Hannibal's undershirt was next, over his head in a flash before he was being kissed again, Will's lips tracing every inch of skin over Hannibal's shoulder as if he were starved. At a sharp bite at his collar, Hannibal growled, taking Will's hips and flipping him around to shove him against the pantry.

With a strength that Will had seen, but hardly ever experienced against himself, Hannibal lifted him from the ground, Will's legs wrapping around Hannibal's middle naturally. His hands were pinned over his head and against the pantry door under a single one of Hannibal's and he gasped for breath as Hannibal kissed him once more.

“*Tu skanus*,” Hannibal moaned against Will’s lips, his free hand slipping under the back of Will’s shirt to feel as much of the man as he could all while supporting him. “*Aš ketinu jus nuvesti į mano pragarą*.” His lips went to Will’s neck, taking in the fluttering of his pulse that was begging for attention. “*Aš noriu tave jausti mano kauluose*.”

Will whimpered as the words were followed by a tongue tasting at him, feeling his blood rush in his veins. The words swirled through Will’s head on repeat, making him ache. Hannibal had to know exactly what all of this was doing to him, how much owning him turned him on. There was no way that Hannibal didn’t know Will's deepest secrets and fantasies. They had already lived two out together already. Killing and running away together.

Hannibal broke contact enough to pull Will’s shirt over his head and Will swiftly let his fingers discover every inch of skin that he could on Hannibal now that his hands were free. Hannibal’s hands snatched up Will’s and brought Wil’s fingertips to his own neck.

Breathing hard, Will did his best to take in what Hannibal was having him touch, a pounding under his fingers, something much faster than when Hannibal was killing. A heart rate that Will had heard rumored to never exceeded 85 beats per minute even while he was in his imprisonment. Not even when he received human pieces in the mail. Something much faster than his heart when they had finished off Francis Dolarhyde and Will had his head pressed to Hannibal’s chest.

“*Ar jūs tai jaučiate?*” Hannibal asked, breath as heavy as Will’s. “*Mano širdis plaka dėl tavęs.”* Will shook his head, wishing he understood what he was being told. Hannibal nuzzled against Will’s neck, kissing just under Will’s jaw, making will shiver. “It beats for you,” Hannibal whispered, breath hot against Will’s skin. “Only you.”

“Hannibal,” Will whined, kissing Hannibal again, craving the taste of the killer. Will’s fingers tightened around Hannibal’s neck as he continued to nip at his lips, the pulse under his flesh so satisfying.

An alarm went off and Will broke the kiss with an angry whimper. Hannibal placed one more quick kiss to Will’s swollen lips and lowered Will back to the floor.

“That’s not fair,” Will whispered, not letting Hannibal leave his grip. “You said twenty minutes.”

“I may have misjudged,” Hannibal answered, trying to catch his breath. “Forgive me.”

Another kiss. This one was not hungry in the slightest. It was an apology, warm and dizzying. The alarm gave another chirp and Hannibal released Will, snatching his shirt from the floor and pulling it back over his head. He picked up his phone and turned off the alarm, going to the oven and opening it, letting the smell of veal fill the kitchen, not nearly sating the hunger that Will was left with. “Will, will you grab me the Port from the bar? We still need to make the Cumberland sauce while this rests.”

Chapter End Notes

La Divina Commedia di Dante Alighieri.-The Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri.

Inferno: Canto I. Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita mi ritrovai per una selva oscura che' la diritta via era smarrita- Inferno: Canto I. In the middle of the journey of our life I found myself in a dark forest that 'the straight path was lost.

Ahi quanto a dir qual era e` cosa dura esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte che nel pensier rinova la paura- Ah, it is hard to speak of what it was, that savage forest, dense and difficult, which even in recall renews my fear.

Aš ketinu praryti jus visus, jei nesate atsargus, Will. Negundyk manęs.- I'm going to swallow you all if you're not careful, Will. Don't seduce me

Tu skanus. Aš ketinu jus nuvesti į mano pragarą. Aš noriu tave jausti mano kauluose.- You are delicious. I am going to lead you to my hell. I want to feel you in my bones.

Ar jūs tai jaučiate? Mano širdis plaka dėl tavęs.-Do you feel it? My heart beats for you.

Thanks again to my sister and my wonderful beta, @PitaGonzalezMe on twitter.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

> “Fire can symbolize many things in a dream, Will.” He gathered up his plate and got to his feet, Will feeling as if he was trying to distance himself from the conversation. “Mostly it symbolizes change. Your subconscious may have just been trying to work through the emotions of us leaving today.”
>
> “But it was so real,” Will muttered, leaning forward with his elbows on the table. “I could feel the heat of the flames, hear the crackling of the wood, smell the smoke.”

Chapter Notes

> So, it's been a while since I wrote this chapter and I tagged two songs to it. I do this when a song was inspirational or if it fit the overall mood of the chapter I was writing. Not sure what mood I was in or if my past self just has a sense of humor, but here they are. One was obviously used for the supposed dream, but the other was something. I have no idea. Haha.
>
> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1b3UdPbqc-k
>
> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzB3JB-0zk4
>
> Thanks again to my sister and my wonderful beta, @PitaGonzalezMe on twitter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Losing You
TERRIFIES ME

Hannibal straightened his tie and looked over himself in the mirror. His body was stiff from yesterday, his limp worse in his leg from having stood on it instead of icing it. His shoulders were stiff and there was a pulsing migraine where his head was split. He should have rested instead of working and maybe he wouldn’t be in so much pain from getting hit by that car.

His eyes went to his bedroom door at movement past it. That would be Will. Hannibal licked at his lips, ready for whatever the morning held for him. He just had to keep working with Will. Will would make it through this. Hannibal had promised.

With a deep breath and his suit coat in place, Hannibal went for the door, opening it and glancing out to find Will in the kitchen, glasses on, but still in his boxers and t shirt, hair messy from sleep.

He was busing himself by pulling some eggs from the fridge and then finding pans in the cabinet beside the stove. Hannibal watched curiously, not wanting to interrupt Will's work. They hadn't finished packing the kitchen figuring it was better to eat at home than risk being out in public for longer than necessary. The rest of everything else was packing in nearly stacked boxes by the front door for the movers to take.

Will had begun cracking eggs into the pan before he finally noticed Hannibal lurking in the doorway of his room. Will smiled brightly and it caught Hannibal off guard. Did he remember? He had to. He was moving around the kitchen like he had been in it a million times.

"Morning," Will said sweetly. "Do you want to come tell me what I'm doing wrong?"

"Did you sleep well?" Hannibal asked, stepping into the kitchen and looking over what Will was doing. The eggs were sizzling in the butter and Hannibal smiled. "I think you're doing fine."

"I didn't really sleep much. I had a nightmare." Will used a spatula to flip the egg and grumbled as the yolk cracked. Hannibal chuckled. "What did I do wrong?"

"You just have to be more gentle," Hannibal answered, placing a kiss to the back of Will's head without a thought. What was wrong with him? He knew Will's mind was struggling. If he couldn't recall fully decorated Christmas trees, then it was fairly possible that he wouldn't remember their frantic tumble that was rudely interrupted.

Will glanced back at him and placed a quick peck to Hannibal's lips before turning back to the pan. "What is the plan this morning?" he asked, flipping the next egg over, arm in an amusingly odd angle that had Hannibal lightly smiling.

"After we eat, we can finish packing and leave," Hannibal explained, getting plates out of the cupboard. "The movers will have all of our things delivered by tonight. I thought you would like to get to know the grounds before we had to worry about unpacking."

"Ok," Will said with a nod, taking the plates from Hannibal who he noticed was visibly limping. "Should you be on your feet?" His voice was concerned and sent a small smile to Hannibal's lips. "And is your head doing alright?" Will lifted the pan from the stove top and scooped the eggs out onto the two plates before placing the pan on a cool burner and turning off the flame.

"What was your nightmare about?" Hannibal deflected, taking the plate with the broken eggs on it so that Will might have the better ones. He could see Will open his mouth to argue, but he fell silent at a dismissive wave from Hannibal.

Will followed Hannibal to the dining table and sat, looking around the very empty apartment, feeling a hollowness in his chest. He pushed the feeling away and dug into his eggs, unsure if he wanted Hannibal's verdict. Will's cooking was stuck in college dorms and scraping pennies. Cans and boxes. Anything cheap and filling that could be mixed together in any form of something to eat, whether tasty or not.

"Don't lie to me Will," Hannibal muttered, placing another forkful into his mouth. "You cook just fine."

"I remember this one time in college," Will muttered, unsure what made him want to open up in the space between them over mediocre eggs that weren't even seasoned well. "My roommate and I were out of money and all we had were eggs and a pack of instant mash potatoes from a dollar store." Will smiled at the twinge of mortification over Hannibal's face. "I worked part time, minimum wage. I couldn't afford anything else," Will defended, unsure why he needed to make himself out to be something better than what he was. "I had to pay for college myself. I wasn't smart enough to get a scholarship like you." At a pointed gaze, Will gave a shrug. "Alright, I didn't apply myself to get a scholarship. I couldn't do the interviews."

But Will was used to not having money. He had always been on the poorer side. He was used to it. It wasn't until Hannibal that Will had begun to indulge a bit more, spending money that he had saved up as a panic backup even though he didn't need it.

"So we fried the eggs, and put them over the mashed potatoes and that was dinner." Will chuckled at Hannibal's frown. "The next day we found three dollars' worth of change in the car we shared and we got sandwiches from the dollar menu at McDonalds."

"That might be more insulting than instant mashed potatoes," Hannibal grumbled, setting his plate aside, now finished.

Will laughed again lightly and Hannibal could feel a tightness in his chest as he watched Will carefully, cataloging every movement the man made. Will didn't laugh enough. Will's fingers rubbed over his lips the same way they had when they had breakfast for the first time together and Hannibal smiled faintly at the memory.

A time before they had broken each other and clung to one another as if it was the only way to hold onto life. A time when they were killer and catcher. A time before they were friends. A time before Will's mind was shattered into pieces that Hannibal was desperately trying to collect and put back together.

Hannibal hoped that today would be another good day. Will had him worried yesterday, though he wouldn't admit it aloud. Will didn't need to know what Hannibal went through almost daily. Especially if he wouldn't remember it in the morning. But today was nice. Today would be an easier day for Hannibal to maneuver and maybe it meant that Will's mind was finally on the mend after his injuries. The mind was always the most difficult to repair.

"Are you going to tell me about your dream?" Hannibal asked into the quiet apartment, calling Will's shining blue eyes from his nearly finished plate and to the man beside him.

Will swallowed and lowered his hands to his lap, wringing out his fingers before they went back to his lips as if to try to hide any ques that Hannibal would have been able to read from them.

"There was a house. I had never been there before," Will started, voice muffled behind his hand. "But I knew it was ours. I don't know how I knew." He looked over Hannibal's face, waiting for an expression, but when none came, Will continued. "There was a fire. Everything was on fire." Will gave a curious look as Hannibal's eyes seemed to light up at the mention of it. "You were stuck inside, unconscious. I couldn't get you out, so I lied beside you and the two of us went up in smoke."

There was a twitch at the corner of one of Hannibal's eyes and Will wanted to ask what the man was hiding from him, but Hannibal quickly placed his mask back on and spoke. "Fire can symbolize many things in a dream, Will." He gathered up his plate and got to his feet, Will feeling as if he was trying to distance himself from the conversation. "Mostly it symbolizes change. Your subconscious may have just been trying to work through the emotions of us leaving today."

"But it was so real," Will muttered, leaning forward with his elbows on the table. "I could feel the heat of the flames, hear the crackling of the wood, smell the smoke."

"Our minds are very good at recording our senses and relaying them back to us," Hannibal explained, giving Will a fake smile. A crease formed between Will's brows and Hannibal did his best to ignore the dislike in the answer given. "Thank you for breakfast, Will. We need to finish packing."

The dismissal stung deep in Will's bones and he had the unnerving feeling in the back of his throat that Hannibal was keeping something from him. A secret. Something that would never see the light of day and it made Will question the vividness of his nightmare. It was another item that Will quickly put into a forgotten memory that he had to try to find. His dreams had always been vivid, but they had never been like this. There weren't any monsters, no ravenstags, no dead girls, just the two of them in acceptance that it was their time. But when had they been in a fire?

Will was pulled abruptly from his mind at a shattering sound and the clatter of silverware against the floor. "Hannibal," he called, racing from his chair and around the side of the table to find Hannibal on his knees, trying to pick up the shards of the plate that had broken.

"I'm ok," he assured Will as Will dropped to his own knees at Hannibal's side.

"It's your leg, isn't it?" Will questioned, helping pick up the larger pieces of the plate. "I told you not to be on it."

"Apologies, Dr. Graham."

Will frowned at the words and he paused in his cleaning for simply a moment before continuing. "Don't do that to me. Don't close off," Will mumbled. "Let me help you. You're not fucking immortal."

Hannibal's movements stilled and Will's eyes flickered over him. "I don't think I have ever heard you use such unsavory language in my presence before," Hannibal muttered.

"That's the only thing you got out of that whole sentence?" Will grumbled, reaching out and taking the shards of glass from Hannibal's hand. He got to his feet and threw them away before coming back and holding a hand out to Hannibal Hannibal took it and Will pulled the man to his feet, having Hannibal wrap an arm around Will's shoulder for support as Will led him back to the table. Hannibal sat down in a chair and Will dropped to his knees between Hannibal's legs.

Hannibal shook his head and tried to push the lewd idea of the position Will was in from his mind. Will sighed and looked over Hannibal's leg for a moment. "You were hit higher up, weren't you?" Hannibal gave a nod and Will got back to his feet. "Alright, either you take off your pants or you let me cut them up." Hannibal frowned in dislike and Will nodded. "That's what I thought."

Will helped Hannibal stand back up, keeping his balance as Hannibal removed his slacks, folding them neatly and placing them on the tabletop. Hannibal sat back down and Will looked over

Hannibal’s bare and muscular legs. One leg had livid purple bruising from his thigh that spider webbed down over his knee and onto his shin. It was angry in its spread and his knee was swollen.

“For a doctor, you’re pretty lazy when it comes to yourself,” Will grumbled, kneeling back down beside Hannibal and looking over the bruising, his hands reaching out, but not making contact, afraid to hurt the man. At a small nod, Will’s fingers began to softly press at the bruising in his knee. “You didn’t break it.”

“No,” Hannibal agreed. “If I had to guess, based on most common injuries from car accidents, I have either torn my meniscus or my ACL.” Hannibal inhaled with a hiss through his teeth as Will pressed a little harder on his knee.

“Is that serious?” Will questioned, getting back to his feet, hand staying on Hannibal’s knee, thumb gently rubbing calming circles against Hannibal’s skin.

“It can be if not treated correctly,” Hannibal mused, hand running through his silvering hair.

“Is it safe to assume you are not treating it correctly?”

“I iced it last night. I should start some physical therapy to avoid a surgical procedure.”

Will ran a hand through his curls, making them somehow messier than they were before, and Hannibal looked over the boy fondly. The clever, cunning boy who cared and empathized far too much. The boy who was clawing at the darkness that he would only continue to fall into if he decided to stay with the monster that was Hannibal.

“Ok.” Will’s hands rested on his hips and he looked around the apartment. “We’ll get you some ice. I want you to rest. I will finish packing.” Will raised a hand as Hannibal tried to argue. “Do not fight me on this. We cannot afford you being injured. Not when you’re my life raft and I need you.”

“I’m sure you could fare without me,” Hannibal muttered, watching as Will went into the kitchen and dug through the freezer for an ice pack. He grabbed a hand towel and wrapped up the ice pack, passing it over to Hannibal who placed the cold to his knee. “You know how to live off the land far better than I ever could. Money gets me where I need to go.”

“Yeah, I’d be feral, sleeping in the dirt, covered in blood and living with a pack of dogs,” Will muttered, finding a broom to clean up the rest of the glass.

“Why do you do that?” Hannibal asked, fingers tapping on the tabletop as he watched Will clean and wash dishes.

“Do what?”

“You dismiss any compliments,” Hannibal pointed out, sitting up a little more in his chair. Will didn’t stop working, no micro pause that Hannibal was used to when he pointed out flaws in Will’s character. Will made no move to answer, simply dried the pan and then tossed the hand towel over his shoulder to start working on the plate that was still in one piece. “Is it because you’re afraid to invoke jealousy or envy?”

Will snorted at that, his normal uncomfortable smile turning up his lips, making his scar glint darkly. “No one has a reason to be jealous of or envy me.” Will dried off the plate and set it aside on the counter, no point in putting it away when all of them were going to be going into boxes.

“Society teaches women to shun compliments, not men. It’s an ego stroke that men are meant to take with pride.”

Will rolled his eyes. “This is reminding me horribly of nights in your office.” He shot Hannibal a pointed look and Hannibal simply shrugged a single shoulder. “Are you playing therapist again, Dr. Lecter?”

“I simply want to understand,” Hannibal replied, eyes locked on Will. Will shifted uncomfortably under the hot gaze on him as he went to get a box to begin packing. He folded it into shape and tossed it on the kitchen floor, digging items out of various cupboards. “Humor me. Is it an insecurity?”

“No,” Will grumbled, his temper coming through defensively as Hannibal picked at his brain. Hannibal knew how far to push Will to get the answers he wanted. Hannibal was the only one that Will gave himself over to even if it upset him. A give and take between the two of them. That was the best way that Hannibal had found to deal with Will. *Quid pro quo.*

“A feeling of worthlessness, then.” It wasn’t a question, a statement that made Will’s jaw clench, which usually meant that Hannibal had guessed correctly. “You’re not worthless, Will.”

Will exhaled deeply and stopped in his work, turning to face Hannibal full on. “It’s not worthlessness. It’s...” Will groaned, hands going to his head as he tried to form the words that were so often clear in his mind, but he knew would make no sense when they came out. “I feel...”

“Yes?” Hannibal prompted gently, watching Will’s body language carefully to help him know what words to pick to make sure Will didn’t shut himself down and retreat into himself.

“I can’t-I can’t believe them,” Will stuttered out, hands now taking fistfulls of his curls. He watched Hannibal’s face for any tells of what Hannibal was thinking, but it was as blank as Hannibal wanted it to be, though his eyes held a curiosity in them.

“Why not, Will?”

“I don’t know if they’re telling the truth.”

Hannibal tipped his head to the side, his free hand rubbing at the stubble along his jaw thoughtfully. “Your whole career has been based on finding the truth. What makes you unable to see your own truths?”

“I don’t know,” Will said with distaste in his tone as he carelessly tossed things into the box now, trying to find something for his hands to do to stop his nervous energy from taking over him as it liked to do when he was confronted with digging into his own mind that was beginning to ache just behind his eye.

“You do know,” Hannibal urged, adjusting the ice pack on his knee, eyes still firmly on Will’s anxious energy manifesting in trembling hands. “Tell me.” The words were gentle and soft, hoping to not upset Will further.

“Be-because,” he got out, hand over his mouth.

“Because?”

“Because I don’t know what I am!” Will shouted, breathing hard as his pacing came to a stop, eyes on Hannibal, hidden behind dark curls. “I have no idea what I am. Am I an absent husband and father? Am I autistic or insane? Am I brilliant or fucked up? Am I a killer? Am I a monster? I don’t have an answer to any of those, so how could someone else possibly know anything about me?”

It was always so intriguing to learn all of Will's inner thoughts. They were as complicated as the next and made his mind bigger and more expansive than it would look to the average person. Will was a labyrinthine of unpredictability that made Hannibal want to dig through every inch of the man, to find all of his secrets and all of his fears and what made him Will Graham.

“You don’t give people enough credit,” Hannibal offered gently, not wanting to step across a line they wouldn’t be able to come back from.

“What would you know about giving people credit? You eat them if they disagree with you,” Will shot back before he could stop himself. His hands fell to his sides and he shrunk back, obviously pulling away from the conversation. Hannibal didn’t say a word and finally the silence was too loud for Will to handle. “I’m sorry.”

“Apology accepted, Will,” Hannibal declared without a hint of any sort of resentment. “Why don’t you go get cleaned up? I will finish up here.”

Will took a step forward as Hannibal got to his feet, tossing the ice pack to the table and reaching for his slacks, knee feeling a tad numb from the cold. Hannibal’s eyes went to Will who had an outstretched hand towards Hannibal with a worried glint in his eyes, but the words didn’t leave his mouth, though Hannibal knew what they would be.

“I am injured, not handicapped,” Hannibal reminded, straightening up now that he was once again presentable. “I can take care of things here. Go relax in the shower, clear your mind.”

Will moved stiffly towards the exit of the kitchen and stopped when he was beside Hannibal, rubbing at his elbow as he tried to form words with a mouth that wouldn’t produce sound, only open and close awkwardly as he tried so desperately to say what was on his mind.

“You do not have to say anything Will,” Hannibal assured, hand taking his shoulder and giving it a squeeze.

“The light and the dark, they all blur together. I don’t know what I’m supposed to do anymore and now I'm stuck,” Will licked at his lips and tipped his head side to side, face scrunched up as the jumbled mess of his mind tried to untangle itself. “Or maybe I've just given up,” he finally decided. His head turned to look at Hannibal who was silent, letting Will unsnarl himself. “And I don’t think I mind.”

Hannibal tilted his head slightly, taking in Will’s words, tasting them carefully before speaking. “You don’t have to think anymore, Will.” He leaned over and placed a careful kiss to Will’s temple. “Let your mind be quiet, *mylimasis*.”

Will blinked at the word, a horrible feeling of knowing what it meant and not being able to place it clinging to his limbs. He blinked several times, scraping through his mind for any sense of what the word could mean, but eventually came up empty. He glanced at Hannibal whose face was much closer than Will thought it would have been, though he didn’t mind.

“What does that mean?” Will asked softly, heart picking up its pace at the closeness, a much more pleasant racing than the anger that had been coursing through him earlier.

“It covers a wide range of-”

“-endearments,” Will interrupted with a nod, echoes of a conversation looping through him. “But you intend it to mean precious.”

“Quite so,” Hannibal agreed faintly. With a deep breath, Hannibal released Will’s shoulder and less than gracefully made his way to the kitchen to straighten up the mess that Will had made in his fit. “Go get cleaned up Will. You can help me after.”

“How do I know that Hannibal?” Will turned back to the kitchen, a hand going to his forehead as he tried to pull the information to the forefront of his mind, but once again coming up empty. Nothing in any of his filing cabinets, nothing in his room strictly of Hannibal. Nothing in his room of odds and ends of information that he had found important at a single moment and had stored away for later use, but it had become more of a junk drawer than a filing cabinet. “I’ve never heard the words before.”

“I’ve called you that before,” Hannibal explained, tone being one of complete honesty.

“I don’t remember that.”

“You obviously do.”

Will’s eyes dropped to the floor and his migraine only seemed to get worse. There was a terrible pounding behind his eye and it was beginning to make it hard for him to see. His hand covered his eyes and he hunched over, trying to block out some of the light from the sun coming through the window.

“Will, are you ok?” Hannibal’s voice asked in concern.

Will waved the words away. “Just a headache. I’ll be back after my shower.”

The shower did nothing to sooth away the pain that investigating his own mind created, the memories still alluding him. They had to be there, Will reasoned with himself. Hannibal didn’t lie. Never lied, twisted the truth, reworded things to make them suit him. In this instance he had no reason to lie though. What would a pet name be something to lie about?

Will’s hand reached out to steady himself on the shower wall as his mind pounded angrily against his skull as if there was an ancient Egyptian trying to scramble his brains into soup for mummification.

He groaned, sinking to his knees, one hand guiding him down while the other pressed against his eye until swirling patterns filled his vision, phantom whispers finally greeting him in voices he knew all too well.

“Please pass me my drink, mylimasis,” Hannibal said, not putting down the book he had been engrossed in all morning. Will obliged, placing the wine glass in Hannibal’s outstretched hand. “Thank you, mylimasis.”

"You keep calling me that," Will pointed out, sitting down opposite Hannibal in an armchair. "What does it mean?"

Hannibal took a small sampling of his wine before using his finger to bookmark his page and focusing his attention on Will, regarding him for a moment more before answering. "It covers a wide range of endearments, but in this case and all others it means precious."

Will snorted causing Hannibal to give him a confused expression. "I'm not precious."

"Deliciously so, I'm afraid," Hannibal contradicted.

Will inhaled deeply, eyes shooting open with a painful moan at the bright light's assault. He quickly closed his eyes once more, both hands holding either side of his head, pushing as hard as he could as if his head were going to split in half and he was trying to hold it together.

"Shit," he hissed out, vision blurry when he opened his eyes once more. He turned off the shower and an immediate cold set in over his body. He pushed himself up and dried himself off before dressing.

He stumbled from the bathroom and out into the living room, nearly colliding with a stack of boxes that hadn't been there earlier. He glanced towards the kitchen and found it empty, his heart sinking as his hand returned to his eyes, palm pressing back into it.

"Will?" Hannibal asked somewhere to Will's left. He rounded a few more boxes and found the doctor sitting on the couch, legs crossed and the black leather notebook open in his lap, fresh scribbles on one of the pages. "Is everything alright?"

"My-" Will inhaled sharply through his teeth, "-head."

"Come here," Hannibal instructed, motioning for Will. Will staggered towards the couch as Hannibal closed the notebook up and put it on the coffee table. Will sat down and hands guided him until he was laying back down on Hannibal's lap. "Symptoms?" he questioned.

"Pounding, gets worse with movement," Will whispered, eyes shut tightly. "Lights and sounds."

"Give me a moment. I will be right back." Hannibal carefully lifted Will's head from his lap and Will was lowered onto the couch, the movement sending a shockwave of pain through his head. His teeth gritted at the sensation. Will could make out the sound of curtains being closed and then darkness as lights were switched off. "Sit up Will. Take these."

Will wanted to argue but couldn't find the strength. He sat up and opened his eyes, the outline of Hannibal before him in the dimmer room, holding out a glass of water and some aspirin. Will took it greedily, swallowing the pills in one go. Hannibal sat back down and Will rested back against Hannibal's lap, sighing into the feeling of fingers pressing into his temples and gently massaging them.

Hannibal's voice was a whisper when he spoke again. "How often do you get migraines like this?"

"Ever since I was in high school," Will answered, his own voice rattling around his head, causing him to wince. "Though they haven't been this bad since..." he trailed off and could see Hannibal nod in the darkness.

“Since the cases,” Hannibal finished for him. “Will, I’m going to teach you something to help, I need you to pay attention so that you can do this if you’re alone.” Will nodded and immediately regretted the movement. Hannibal’s fingers left Will’s temples and Will whimpered at the loss of slight relief. He could feel Hannibal pick up one of his hands, gently caressing it. “There is a pressure point in your wrist; it’s called the LU-7. You find it by interlocking your thumb of one hand with that of the other, the point lies on the edge of the index finger, in a depression between the sinew and the bone.”

Will could feel Hannibal stretch out his hand and then his index finger caressing the skin at Will’s wrist. With the point now found, Hannibal applied pressure to it with his thumb and Will wanted to roll his eyes at the idea that a pressure point would do anything to help something that not even the strongest medication could take away.

In a breath of fresh air, relief pooled through Will as if the migraine had been magically whisked away. His eyes opened and he inhaled deeply, freedom from the pain was sweet and Will nearly wanted to cry.

“Better?” Hannibal asked softly, keeping pressure on the spot, his other hand running through Will’s damp curls. Will gave a nod with a grateful hum and a relieved sigh. “Rest here, *mylimasis*.”

Will gave another small nod, eyes sliding closed, body tired from how tense he had been holding it. He relaxed into Hannibal’s grip, a drowsiness pulling at his mind. He wasn’t sure if he slept at all, but after a time of floating happily through painlessness, Hannibal gently shook him.

“Will, the cab is here. It’s time to go.”

“No,” Will argued tiredly.

“Come along silly boy,” Hannibal said with a hint of a smile in his voice. “I’m going to release your hand. If the migraine comes back I will be more than happy to continue holding it when we get our things down to the car.”

Just as swiftly as the pain had gone, the moment that Hannibal’s grip loosened on his wrist, it slammed back into him, making his stomach churn and a nauseated feeling coat his throat.

Hannibal helped him up, handing him a bag of personal effects before snatching up his notebook and leading the way from their apartment and out into the cold winter air.

When Hannibal had said a cabin the first thing that Will had imagined was a hunting cabin not unlike Garret Jacob Hobbs’. Will stared out of the cab window as they rounded a cluster of pine trees that would keep their new home out of sight.

The snow was thick and piled up around the wooden stairs and deck that had to be a wrap around. The roof was slanted in much the same way as Hannibal’s safe house had been and there was a large pane of glass that went from floor to ceiling. It was no doubt two stories, something more akin to a house than a cabin, but Hannibal had been right. This felt more like a home than the apartment had.

The cab stopped in the driveway and Will exited the car, breath floating away into the air, fingers trembling in the cold immediately.

"Is the ice going to be a problem with your knee?" Will questioned, looking over his shoulder as Hannibal made his way around the front of the cab and to Will's side.

"What do you think?" Hannibal asked with a grin, changing the subject before it had even fully begun. "I picked it out for you."

The abruptness of the confession took Will aback and he found himself at a loss for words. "Me?" he finally got out as the cab took off back up the driveway.

"*Oui, mon cher.*" Hannibal gave a nod with a pleased smile at Will's reaction. Hannibal began up to the house, a bag over his shoulder, his other hand still holding firmly to the notebook that he had kept expertly out of Will's reach, but still within agonizing sight.

"Do you enjoy making it so I don't understand you?" Will grumbled beginning to trudge through the snow after Hannibal.

Hannibal laughed brightly, a laugh that Will wasn't sure he had ever heard before, but immediately decided that he liked and wanted to hear more of.

"I know you understood that," he tossed back, making his way up the stairs and onto the deck, searching for the key on top of the door hinge that was covered in snow. "And I am sure you know Creole from your time in the south."

Will came to stand beside Hannibal and stomped his shoes off before entering the now open door. "I don't know much Creole and you are more than well aware that Creole and French are extremely different, *mô shè*."

For once Will felt like he finally had a step up on Hannibal, knowing something that the man didn't in all of his profound wisdom. There was a smugness that Will couldn't suppress at the idea that Hannibal wouldn't understand Creole, but the smugness quickly faded as he finally took in the room around him.

Wood greeted him from all angles, smelling strongly of a mixture of pine and cedar. The ceilings were tall and there was a catwalk for the second story that reminded Will of the library in Hannibal's office. Chandeliers lit up the room and Will found that the light helped drown out some of the cold of the heater not having been turned on yet.

A large stone fireplace reached from floor to ceiling, surrounded by two large couches and several armchairs. Tucked away in the corner was a piano that caught the chandelier's light against its polished black face.

In the open plan, Will could also see the kitchen, something large and professional, something that he was certain Hannibal had picked specifically for himself. There was a long island and bar as well as stainless steel everything, looking freshly cleaned and ready to be used.

In the dining room was a good 12-foot table with a forest green table runner down the middle of it. Beside the table was a wine cabinet, completely filled with bottles waiting to be cracked open.

"Does it please you?"

Will blinked as he tried to understand the words that were said, his mind still so wrapped up in the grandeur of the supposed to be humble cabin. Will gave a small nod, stepping further into their new home, trying to take in the fact that all of this was for him.

“The bedrooms are upstairs. There should be some wood already chopped on the deck so we can start a fire, if you would like,” Hannibal continued on. “And the river is just past those trees.”

Hannibal set his bag and notebook on the dining table and went to turn on the heater. The fan whirred as it started up and Hannibal stepped back over to Will who still stood in stunned silence.

“How is your migraine?” he asked, trying to get Will’s attention back on him. Will blinked, eyes coming to Hannibal’s face, but blankly. Hannibal watched as his words finally registered in the empath’s eyes.

“Better,” he replied, eyes quickly going back to the house. “Thank you.”

Hannibal looked around the room for a moment before putting his attention back on the man in front of him. “Is there a problem?”

Will shook his head. “No.” He laughed softly, a slight smile coming to his lips. “I just... Have never had something like this before. Nothing this lavish and especially not meant for me.”

“That doesn’t seem quite right, does it?” Hannibal mused with a small hum. Will gave him a confused look. “Anything can be yours,” Hannibal offered, turning away from Will and heading for the door to fetch some wood to start a fire. “You just have to ask.”

“Anything?” Will questioned, guilt knotting in his stomach painfully. “Within reason, right?”

Hannibal shook his head. “Anything,” he clarified.

Will swallowed and quickly went to go help Hannibal get some firewood, but stopped as his eyes found Hannibal’s discarded things on the dining table. Will hesitated, eyes on the door that had been closed to keep the cold out. He debated it for a moment longer before stepping over to the table and reaching out for the black notebook, fingers trailing over the chilled leather.

He picked it up and his fingers trailed the edge of the pages, nearly flipping open the cover, longing to see what Hannibal’s mind had been letting sink into the pages with a hand that was more closely related to calligraphy than chicken scratch.

With a deep breath, Will set the book back down on the table, unopened, and went for the door. He pulled it open to find Hannibal with a decent sized stack in his arms and Will went to take it from him.

“You shouldn’t be on that knee,” Will reminded, adjusting his balance to take on the new weight, his shoulder straining painfully, but he did his best to hide the discomfort on his face.

“I am perfectly capable of taking care of myself, Will,” Hannibal assured, going back to the woodpile and stacking some more pieces in the crook of his arm.

“I know you are,” Will assured as he made his way back into their house and towards the fireplace after once more stomping the snow from his boots. He dumped the wood into a small log rack and turned to help Hannibal once again with his. With the wood now in the log rack, Will turned back around, taking Hannibal’s arm as Hannibal turned to leave. He turned back and Will stepped closer to him, looking down at his grip on Hannibal’s sleeve. “Please let me take care of you.”

There was a sharp inhale and Will's head snapped up, afraid that he might have said something wrong. Hannibal's maroon eyes flickered over Will's face in shock at the words, not sure what he was supposed to do with them. He had never heard them said to him before. It was always him saying it to someone else, not really caring if he really did help or not.

"You mean that?" Hannibal found himself asking, unsure why he cared so much for it to be true. There was just something about the idea of being able to relax into a person and trust them that was so foreign to him, but he found himself wanting to let Will be that person.

"Of course, Hannibal." Will pushed closer, rising onto his toes enough to place a kiss to Hannibal's mouth, loving and quiet, not needing to be anything more or anything less than what it was. "Let someone help you for a change. Let me take care of you." Hannibal rested his head against Will's with a small nod, a feeling of release in his chest at letting himself be that open for the first time in his life, as if he could fully breathe for the first time in years.

Will stepped along the edge of the river that was frozen over, though he could still hear it running beneath the ice, something calming in the quiet mountain air. Pine trees were frosted white and Will's breath danced among the branches as he made his way through the snow, hands pushed into his pockets.

The clouds had covered up the sun and were a swirling light grey, promising more snow to fall sooner rather than later. There was a crispness on the wind that blew against Will's face, making his cheeks go red with the cold.

He had nearly forgotten that Hannibal was beside him. Hannibal was quiet, like the predator he was, hands in his pockets as he followed in Will's footsteps through the snow. Will gave a small smile, checking Hannibal's limp to see if it had worsened and finding that he was still standing strong, Will pushed on, a hand reaching out to move a branch out of his way.

He glanced around him once more and a small smile covered his lips, the feeling of being home sinking into his bones, though he was missing watching the dogs bounding through the snow, making a mess of the pristine powder. He wasn't sure how long they could stay here, but the house was big enough. Maybe Hannibal would let him get one or two. He hadn't pictured Hannibal as one to enjoy animals being around, but Hannibal had promised anything and Will was a good trainer. The dogs would be well behaved.

He was about to breach the subject when there was an odd, echoing sound. A slipping and then a crash and splash. Will spun around quickly to find himself alone, Hannibal nowhere in sight, but the evidence of him having been there was present.

The snow along the bank of the river was displaced from a slip and the river was flowing freely now that it was uncovered from the ice. Will raced towards the edge of the river as quickly as he could through the snow, panic shooting through his body as it had when he was trying to protect Abigail.

His body was jittery with the chemicals as he dropped to his knees to search the water for the man that had yet to reappear at the surface, panicked that the river current had swept Hannibal under the ice.

Tension grew in Will's face and hands as his stomach twisted, sparking something hot and angery within him. His breathing became more rapid, shallower, eyes wandering the flowing water, memories of salt in his mouth making him want to spit.

“Hannibal,” Will choked out, snatching up the man’s hand as he, after an eternity of waiting, broke the surface. Will pulled as hard as he could on Hannibal to get the gasping and sputtering man to the edge of the river. He grabbed the back of Hannibal’s winter coat and dragged on the fabric until he was able to pull Hannibal from the icy water and into the snow.

Hannibal trembled, face pale and lips so deep blue they were becoming a purple. His breath still came out in gasps, short and ragged. Will leaned over him, taking Hannibal’s face in his hands, the skin frozen under Will’s fingers.

“Hannibal, listen to me,” Will instructed, seeing himself as a boy shivering in the snow, clothes dripping freezing water from them. “You need to steady your breathing. You’re in shock. Come on. Focus.” Will took Hannibal’s arms and pulled him up and onto his feet, only for Hannibal to stumble on shaking knees. Will caught him and promptly turned so his back was at Hannibal’s chest, hoisting the man onto his back, wrapping Hannibal’s shivering arms around his neck.

Will shuttered as the cold penetrated his own clothes, making him wet as well. He began the trek back to the cabin that was in the distance, instructing Hannibal how to breathe and to stay calm, over and over like a mantra.

As soon as Will got the door to the cabin open, he moved Hannibal in front of the fireplace that was still smoldering slightly. He placed Hannibal on the floor and dropped to his knees beside him.

“Hannibal, can you undress yourself?” Will asked, receiving just blank eyes looking back at him. How long had they been outside? Will knew the statistics. He had read everything he could on the subject after his fall, learned everything he could because he had a morbid fascination about it. He had ten minutes before hypothermia would set in and then it would be more difficult to take care of Hannibal.

He jumped into action quickly, hands immediately going to work at stripping away Hannibal’s soaking wet clothing. Coat, suit coat, tie, vest, dress shirt. By the third layer, Will rolled his eyes at the ridiculousness of Hannibal’s wardrobe.

Once Hannibal was completely stripped, Will snatched a blanket from the couch that was probably more meant for aesthetic purposes than for use, and wrapped it around Hannibal’s shivering shoulders.

“Hannibal, I need you to stay with me, alright?” Will asked, hand pushing dripping hair from Hannibal’s face. Hannibal gave a small nod, finally mentally there. Will jumped into action at that, quickly adding more wood to the fire to get it going again. Flames started to rise and Will moved back over to Hannibal, taking his hand. “Get closer to the fire. You need to get warm.” He pulled Hannibal closer to the now roaring flames and again tucked the blanket in closer around Hannibal.

Will got to his feet, pulling his own wet jacket off and tossing it into the pile of discarded clothes before rushing to the kitchen and digging through the cabinets until he found a kettle. He filled it with water and put it on the stove before running back to the living room, looking around for something else to help Hannibal keep in his body heat, knowing that none of their clothing had been brought over from their apartment yet.

Will sprinted up the stairs and found one of the bedrooms, ripping the duvet off of a bed and running back down the stairs to the screech of the kettle. He draped the thicker blanket around

Hannibal and then went to the kitchen, pulling the kettle from the stove and searching once more through the cabinets until he found mugs and a large variety of teas. He snatched both down and ripped open the box, the tea bags scattering the counter, though he didn't care.

With cups full of hot tea, Will made his way back to the living room, setting the cups down on the hearth before adding more wood to the fire. He knelt down beside a still shivering Hannibal and carefully cupped the man's cheek in his hand, calling tired eyes to his face.

Hannibal's lips were still an unsettling color of blue and his skin still sickly pale that gave him the odd appearance of being his actual age. Will had never thought of the man as old, though he was older. He had only seen the charm and the never ending politeness that was sometimes sharp, but Hannibal was, in all respects, human.

"Well, I know you probably hate it, but shivering is a good sign. Your body is still trying to get you warm," Will explained, getting back to his feet and beginning to pull off his own coats and shirts, stripping down himself, grateful for the wet clothing to be gone. He lowered himself back to the floor, the fire hot against his skin, but he didn't care. "How are you feeling?"

"C-Cold," Hannibal mumbled through chattering teeth.

Will gave a small half smile and carefully pulled open the cocoon of blankets around Hannibal before carefully inserting himself as well, hugging Hannibal tightly against his body, chest to chest. Will shuttered at the frigid skin that touched his own, but he pulled Hannibal closer.

"You're going to be alright," Will whispered, resting his chin on Hannibal's shoulder. Hannibal gave an absent nod and Will reached out of the blanket for one of the mugs on the hearth. Will pulled back enough to take Hannibal's hands and place them around the mug. "You need to drink this, alright? It will help, even if you don't want to." Hannibal shook his head and Will frowned at his stubbornness. His hand took Hannibal's face and guided him to meet a blue gaze. "You said you would let me take care of you, let me take care of you," Will insisted softly, thumb caressing Hannibal's sharp cheekbones.

He led Hannibal's mug up to Hannibal's lips and watched carefully to make sure that he was drinking the tea. Will took the cup and set it aside, momentarily satisfied with Hannibal's action. He hugged Hannibal back against him, cradling the killer's head against his shoulder.

The room was quiet, save for the crackling of the fire and Hannibal's more steady breathing next to Will's ear. Will placed a kiss to Hannibal's head, hair now nearly dry, letting Hannibal rest for a moment before making him drink more of the tea.

Color was slowly returning to Hannibal's skin, though he still kept himself small in some instinctive way to keep in his body heat. His shivering had subsided slightly, but Will made sure to keep them close, sharing body heat until he had to go and stoke the fire.

Once the flames were back and blaring heat obnoxiously, Will snuggled himself back into the blankets and let Hannibal rest against him, still seeking out any warmth he could find, fingers bitingly cold as they wrapped around Will's bareback.

"You scared me," Will whispered softly, relaxing into the hold and placing another kiss to Hannibal's head. "I thought maybe you had gotten stuck under the ice. I'm..." Will paused, trying to find the right word to describe how he felt, though none of the ones he said aloud ever really conveyed what he was thinking. Ecstatic, thrilled, elated possibly. "Glad you're alright."

“My knee twisted weird and I fell in,” Hannibal whispered, breath warm against Will’s neck.

“You are resting the rest of the night,” Will said firmly. “That’s nonnegotiable.” Hannibal simply nodded in surrender. “You are in absolutely no position to be doing anything else. I’ll be surprised if you don’t end up with a cold and a fever as well.”

“How did you know what to do?”

Will nuzzled his face into Hannibal’s hair, inhaling deeply of a chill and something that was simply Hannibal that he couldn't exactly place. Wine, books, some sort of spice and something else.

“When I was younger, my father was going to teach me how to ice fish and I decided to race out onto the lake and fell through,” Will explained, recalling the way his breath was punched from his lungs the moment he hit the water. “My father pulled me out. I was a lot worse off than you though. I had to stay in the hospital overnight. I had severe hypothermia. I think you’re just chilled. It wasn’t quite as cold today as it was when I fell in.”

"I'll live?" Hannibal teased, shivering once more in Will's hold. Will chucked deeply and Hannibal closed his eyes, enjoying the way he could feel the vibrations in Will's chest.

"I think you'll live," Will agreed, enjoying the closeness of their bodies, this feeling somehow more intimate than their make out sessions that were always stopped before Will wanted them to be. "How are you feeling?"

"I'll be alright."

"And your knee?"

"I don't think I have to ice it again for a bit."

Will snorted at the comment and pulled back to look over Hannibal's face. The back of his fingers reached up and caressed Hannibal's cheek.

"I'm relieved you're alright." Will watched as Hannibal leaned into his touch, letting his fingers trail over Hannibal's face again. "Losing you terrifies me, Hannibal."

"*Aš tave myliu*," Hannibal said softly and Will shook his head with a huff of air through his nose as he smiled.

"What does that mean?"

"What language do I have to say it in for you to understand?"

There was a tiny smile on Hannibal's lips, his cocky self back. Something that Will would never admit that he liked.

"English preferably," Will answered, tipping his head to the side.

Hannibal shook his head in dismissal of Will's wants. "*Jag älskar dig*." Will laughed at that, biting his bottom lip between his teeth with another shake of his head. "*Ti amo*." Will shivered at the flash in Hannibal's eyes, though he still didn't fully understand what the man was trying to get at. "*Je t'aime*."

Will gave another laugh. "At least I know that that one was French."

"You Americans are so poorly educated," Hannibal mumbled with a frown.

"Then stop being so smart," Will teased, leaning forward to nuzzle Hannibal's nose with his own. "What did you say?"

Hannibal made a sound of annoyance and placed a lingering kiss to the corner of Will's lips, testing the waters. He had only never said the words out loud before, only admitted to them when Will had asked.

"I love you."

The words felt funny leaving his mouth, not hidden behind another language. They were out in the open now for the universe to do what she wanted with them, a pawn pushed forward and waiting for Fate to attack or spare.

Hannibal couldn't recall having ever said the words to anyone but his sister before. Not even to his aunt. But if anyone deserved to hear the words it was Will.

The words had been created for the single purpose of Will hearing them. And Hannibal was sure that Will had heard the words as often as Hannibal had said them.

Will licked his lips, moving away from Hannibal a bit, taking his warmth with him, causing Hannibal to go cold instantly.

"You don't have to feel obligated to say it back," Hannibal added quickly. "I just want you to know that that is how I feel and it's yours to do with it what you want."

Will was silent as he took in the words, letting them soak into his skin, trying to decide if they were poison or not. It was, at the very least to say, astonishing that Hannibal was allowing himself to be so open.

The three words that had come from his lips were undoubtedly unfamiliar to Hannibal and Will couldn't recall ever having believed them from any of his short lived relationships. They were over as soon as they discovered what his mind was like. The only one who hadn't left him was Hannibal and whether he was still there because he really loved Will or because he just wanted to use Will, Will couldn't bring himself to care. The light and dark were blurred.

"That's very forward, Dr. Lecter," Will teased, a smile returning to his face. "Is this another manipulation technique you like to use?" Hannibal shook his head with a slightly offended look in his eyes. "You mean, you don't want to use me?"

"That entirely depends." Hannibal said softly.

"On what?"

"On if you want to be used."

Will could feel a heat rise to his cheeks that he knew wasn't from the blankets or fire. "I wouldn't be upset in certain aspects," Will admitted, throat thick.

"And what are those certain aspects?" Hannibal pressed, chancing to lean in closer once more.

"One of those moments would be right now, if you weren't still freezing cold."

"Doesn't movement encourage heat?" Hannibal offered with a shrug.

"You're impossible," Will laughed, shaking his head so his curls bounced about. He leaned forward and stole a quick kiss from Hannibal, leaving Hannibal in mild shock. Hannibal wanted to get used to Will reaching out first, but he wasn't quite sure how long this would last. Another good day, another day looming tomorrow when they both woke. "I'm going to work on dinner. You stay close to the fire and finish that tea. It will help keep you warm," Will instructed. "Let me know if you start getting cold again. I can find more blankets."

"Yes, Dr. Graham."

Will gave a crooked half smile at the name that wasn't used in an attempt to hurt this time. With another kiss, Will removed himself from the blankets and wrapped Hannibal up once more, making sure he had a cup of tea in hand before moving to the kitchen to look through the cupboards until he found the pantry.

Most of the items were fresher looking, nothing much in boxes or cans, Will noted with a small nod. Something Hannibal had probably made sure of. Will couldn't picture Hannibal opening a can of Campbell's soup and putting it in the microwave to eat. The image of a man in a three piece suit using a can opener made Will grin.

But there were some things. Odd bits and ends that Hannibal must have gotten for Will, because he was very certain that Hannibal would never openly eat spam or canned chili or corned beef hash. But these were all things that Will had in his pantry when he lived in Virginia. Items he was familiar with, one of those being Dinty Moore.

Will pulled two cans from the pantry, closing the door behind him and went on the hunt for pots and pans and a can opener. After finding one of each, the kitchen bare in utensils for when their boxes arrived, Will opened both cans and dumped them into a pot, putting it on the stove top with a lid over it.

"Are you drinking your tea?" he called over his shoulder, glancing back at Hannibal who had curled himself into a smaller ball much closer to the fire that was beginning to die down again. Will quickly went for the fireplace and added more wood to it before looking over Hannibal's pale face. Will found both cups of tea emptied and replaced back on the hearth. "Would you like anymore?"

Hannibal shook his head and Will picked up the glasses to wash them, but stopped. He knelt down, a hand reaching out to Hannibal's forehead and pressing carefully into it. Clammy and warm.

"You're starting to get a fever," Will muttered. "It's normal after rewarming. I'm going to get you some medicine. I think I have some aspirin in my bag."

Will fetched the medicine and another warm cup of tea rather than a cold cup of water. He knelt back down next to Hannibal and held out the items. Hannibal slowly took them, not fighting Will much to Will's surprise. Will placed the cup on the hearth and caressed Hannibal's hair, fatigued eyes blinking.

"I need you to stay awake for me, alright?" Will asked, calling Hannibal's gaze to focus in on him instead of being lost in his own head space. "I know you want to sleep, but I need you to eat something and then I will let you rest." A single nod was Will's answer. "Are you doing alright? Do

I need to get you another blanket?" A shake of his head. "Alright," Will whispered, pressing a kiss against Hannibal's forehead. He got up to go back to the stove, but was stopped at a hand around his ankle.

"Don't go," Hannibal whispered, eyes distant once more.

"I promise I will be right back," Will assured, bending down to remove Hannibal's hand. "Promise." Hannibal wrapped the blanket back around himself and Will went back to the stove, stirring the bubbling pot and then putting some bread into a toaster.

With stew ladled out into two bowls and each with a piece of buttered toast, Will made his way back to the fireplace, bowls on the hearth as more wood was added to the fire. Will sat down beside Hannibal and held out the bowl, which Hannibal looked at with a disdain, but took all the same.

"You're not putting up much of a fight," Will commented as he dipped his toast into the stew and took a bite of it.

"You said you would take care of me," Hannibal explained in a voice that was feeble and horse. "I trust you to do that. Especially since I am in no position to care for myself."

Will's tongue trailed over his teeth as he took in the words. He took another bite of gravy dipped toast and hummed. "How did those words taste?"

"Like vinegar."

Will watched curiously as Hannibal took a spoonful of carrots and potatoes and placed them in his mouth. Will smiled with a snort at the instant look of dislike across Hannibal's features, but Hannibal didn't say a word. He simply took another bite, obviously trying to appease Will. But was it poor and uneducated chef Will, or Dr. Graham's orders?

"Eat as much as you can," Will instructed. "It will help warm you up. You can sleep after." They sat in silence for a moment longer until Will had finished, bowl placed aside on the hearth, eyes watching the fire dance despite the burn against his skin from how close he was to it. "Please tell me the truth."

Hannibal's hands paused and he lowered the spoonful that was halfway to his mouth back into the bowl, looking over at Will's shadowed face that caught the light from the fire at just the right angles to make him look nearly holy.

"What would you like to know?" Hannibal questioned, letting his now free hand grip the bowl, hoping the warmth would soak into his fingers.

"Is your journal about me?"

"Yes."

Will gave a small nod, chewing on his cheek in thought, unsure how to take the confirmation. "And, uh..." Will rubbed at the back of his neck. "Is it about my mental health?"

"In a way, yes."

"My profile?"

Hannibal took another bite of the canned garbage that Will had the audacity to like. But he would do whatever Will asked. The give and take, the push and pull. Trust went both ways and Hannibal was doing his best to make sure that he gave just as much as Will did. “I have no need to analyze your personality in any medical sense anymore Will. I am not your physiatrist any longer.”

“Will you let me read it?”

“No.”

Will knew it was a long shot at best. He wasn’t going to be able to get his hands on the notebook unless Hannibal were out or asleep, but now that Hannibal knew Will wanted to read the notebook, he was sure that Hannibal would hide it from him.

“Can I read it someday?” Will amended, eyes still captivated by the flames.

“It’s possible,” Hannibal answered softly, placing his half-finished bowl onto the hearth beside Will’s. “When I reach the conclusion I want.”

“And what conclusion is that, Dr. Lecter?” Will grumbled, his tone coming out much harsher than he meant it to.

“That you’re stable and safe, *mylimasis*.”

Will’s frown softened and he sighed. He always let his anger and fear get the better of him, speak for him when he didn’t want them to. “Forgive me.” Hannibal nodded in acceptance and Will pushed himself to his feet. “Would you like to sleep now?” Another simple nod. “Alright. Let me get something set up for you. Do you want to stay next to the fire?”

“Yes.”

With that small word, Will left and went for the stairs, climbing them two at a time until he found the bedroom he had torn apart in his haste. He grabbed the pillows that were spilled across the floor and shoved them under his arm before he found the second bedroom and pulled the pillows and blanket from that as well.

Once back downstairs, he tossed the Items onto one of the armchairs before giving Hannibal a hand to his feet. He moved Hannibal aside and then pushed one of the heavy couches closer to the fire.

Hannibal watched, dazed slightly by the day’s events. Will’s movements were fluid and Hannibal placed them to muscle memory, most likely from nightmares that left Will not wanting to be anywhere near his bedroom, so he set up camp on the couch.

The blanket was folded in half and placed over the couch, pillows going next. Will stood upright, hands on his hips as he turned to Hannibal. “Come lay down.” Hannibal followed the instructions and unwrapped himself from the warmth of the blankets around him so that he could lay on the makeshift bed. Will covered him up in the blankets once more and Hannibal curled up, heavy eyelids sliding shut. “I’m going to get more wood. I’ll be back in a moment. Get some sleep, *mô shè.”*

Chapter End Notes

Please don't hate me for my translations. I speak a bit of French and Spanish, but none of the other languages used. All translations are thanks to dear Google.

mylimasis- precious

Oui mon cher- Yes, my dear

mô shè- my dear

Aš tave myliu- I love you

Jag älskar dig, Ti amo, Je t'aime- I love you.

Also, on another note, the pressure point for Will's migraine does exist. I've had migraines since middle school and sometimes, even with my prescriptions, that pressure point is the only relief I get and it really is an immediate relief, but only lasts as long as you hold the point. Anyways, just thought it was a cool little thing. Maybe it will help someone in the future.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

> "I remember snippets, blurbs of things and I don't know if they are dreams or real or hallucinations."
>
> "Could I possibly be of service?"
>
> "No offense, but the last time I let you help with my mind, I lost it."

Chapter Notes

> I know that it's kinda the wrong holiday in the book, but it was Christmas when I wrote this chapter. Oh well. I hope you guys enjoy it all the same.
>
> Here are the songs for this chapter.
>
> Unto us a child is born: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXgppSgSkoY
>
> The Hallelujah Chorus: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GDKERcR_XFY
>
> Overture from Handel's "Messiah": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ssYWhU11lto
>
> O Come Emmanuel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMe0Fi8OqE8
>
> Clair De Lune: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2deXwf4drE
>
> Half a man by Dean Lewis: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lD5jhtkVuOY
>
> Thanks again to my sister and my wonderful beta, @PitaGonzalezMe on twitter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Losing You Terrifies Me

A yellow light pulled Hannibal from his sleep with a deep inhale. It took a moment for his mind to shed the sleep away and to allow him to open his eyes. He groaned and quickly closed them again at the brightness of the sun through the window.

His limbs ached, cheeks burning, skin damp with sweat and his lungs breathed out heat. His breath quivered in short, quick gasps every time he inhaled, his lungs having no choice but to painfully and rigidly take in the chilled air around him, trying to put out the fever in his lungs.

The crackling of fire made Hannibal open his eyes once more, blurred flames twirling about, most likely from just being fed. Hannibal blinked several times, rubbing at his eyes with frozen fingers, his body such a mess of hot and cold.

He glanced around and slowly sat up, hands going to his chest that had a sweater on it. He was certain he had fallen asleep without anything on. By the front door was a large stack of broken down boxes and Hannibal tried to recall when the movers had come to drop anything off, but he couldn't find any recollection of such an event.

There was a light snore and Hannibal glanced down to find Will. He was slouched between the fireplace hearth and the couch, head resting on the cushion by where Hannibal's head would have been.

He was dressed too, in his jeans, button up shirt and boots that looked wet, like he had just been in the snow. His glasses were crooked on his nose. In one hand was a book and in the other was a mug of tea that was steaming and dangerously close to being tipped over.

There was a large pile of wood splinters across the heart and the floor that Hannibal frowned at. That would need to be cleaned. Will must have been splitting wood all night to keep the fire going.

Hannibal stretched out on the couch and a side table that had clearly been moved, caught his eye. On it was a cup of water and a note telling Hannibal to take the aspirin when he woke.

Hannibal gave a small smile and did as the note instructed before laying back down, letting his heavy head relax into the pillows. He reached out and gently caressed Will's curls for a moment or two before the movement snapped Will into an upright position with a gasp.

He turned around with concerned and wide eyes, chest rising and falling, book and cup completely forgotten. "What's wrong?" he asked quickly, getting to his knees. His hand immediately took Hannibal's forehead. "You're burning up. You need some medicine. I will get it-"

"Will," Hannibal interrupted gravelly, hand reaching out and taking the one that was still against his forehead. "I took some. Please calm down." Will exhaled deeply, elbow resting on the couch cushion, head resting in his palm.

"Sorry," he whispered. "I've just been worried. Been up all night unpacking and taking care of you and..." he trailed off with another sigh.

"Did you sleep at all?" Hannibal pushed himself up on his elbow, head tipped to the side, muscles groaning at the movement.

"Dozed a few times here and there. The fire went out once or twice. You would complain of being cold." Will looked back up with bloodshot eyes behind his glasses.

"Will, would you like to sleep?"

“I’m alright,” he insisted, moving his things from the floor and to the hearth where they wouldn’t be disturbed. He rubbed at his eyes under his glasses and Hannibal frowned.

“Lying is rude, Will.” Will flinched at the words, but didn’t look up. “Let me ask again. Would you like to sleep?” Will nodded with a small exhausted sob coming from his throat. He looked up, eyes brimming with tears. “Take off your boots.” Will obeyed, tossing the shoes to the side. Hannibal lifted the edge of the blanket and Will hesitantly rested himself on the couch, slotting himself against Hannibal. Hannibal let the blanket drape over Will as Will quickly buried his face deep into Hannibal’s flushed neck. “You unpacked everything?”

“Yes,” Will muttered, his lips tickling in their light touch against Hannibal’s skin.

“And kept the fire going all night?”

“Yes.”

“And took care of me?”

This time Will nodded, hiding further against Hannibal. Hannibal removed his glasses and set them on the arm of the couch. His fingers played with Will’s curls, the other hand rubbing soothing circles into Will’s back.

“You’re such a good boy, Will,” Hannibal said. Will shivered at the compliment and Hannibal quickly stored that away to use against Will later. “Sleep now.”

The day wore away lazily between dozing off against each other, taking more medicine, and the reading of Dante while fingers tangled in curls and lips kissing opened mouthed and satisfyingly easy over skin.

“*Poscia ch'io v'ebbi alcun riconosciuto, vidi e conobbi l'ombra di colui che fece per viltade il gran rifiuto*,” Hannibal said, nuzzling his nose into Will’s hair and inhaling deeply of the smell of that aftershave that he detested but was simply a mark of Will’s now.

“What does that mean?” Will whispered, hiding his face in Hannibal’s chest. Hannibal paused, blinking as he tried to separate himself from the literary world he had been sucked into.

It was the first time that Will had asked for a translation from Hannibal about the book and Hannibal was surprised it had taken him that long to ask.

Hannibal hummed as he read over the words once more, trying to find the right words in English, the still lingering fever making it hard for him to work.

"After I had recognized someone," he began slowly, testing the words. "I saw and knew the shadow of him who made the great refusal for cowardice."

Will let the words encircle him and couldn't help but feel as if the words were describing him in a sense, curious if Hannibal had changed something in translation to make it relate more to him.

"Is that what it really says, Hannibal?" Will gave a yawn and Hannibal smiled softly.

"Of course," he whispered, placing a kiss to Will's curls.

"I didn't think you would be one to laze around all day without ever getting dressed," Will pointed out.

Hannibal closed the old book and set it aside with a thoughtful hum. “I don’t think I ever have before. But I also have never suffered from a fever like this before.” Will sat up a bit more, hands resting on Hannibal’s chest, chin on his hands, an expectant and waiting expression on his face. “I am not often taken ill,” Hannibal explained. “And if I am, I can usually get rid of it with a bit of fresh lemon tea and some exercise.”

Will frowned at that with a disgusted look. “That’s the last thing I would want to do if I was sick.”

“Today has been rather pleasant, I agree.” Hannibal combed his fingers through Will’s hair for the millionth time that day, unable to get enough of how silky smooth the curls were and the way that the late afternoon sunlight from the large window made his curls shine with a coppery tone. “Thank you.”

Will’s eyebrows furrowed and a confused expression plastered over his face. “For what?’

Hannibal chuckled, warm and amused. Will tipped his head to the side to hear the rumbling in Hannibal’s chest better. “What do you think I would be thanking you for, pretty boy?” Hannibal smiled as Will quickly hid his face in his hands in hopes that Hannibal wouldn't see the dangerous amount of blush that had covered his cheek. “Look at me,” Hannibal ordered in a firm voice, one that Will was sure he had heard be used against him before, though he couldn’t quite place it. When Will didn’t obey, Hannibal’s fingers that were in his hair took handfuls of the locks and pulled until Will was looking up at him. "All of your attention must always be on me."

Will gave a single nod in response and Hannibal smirked.

"Good boy," he whispered, words so horribly familiar that it gave Will the sense of a dark room on a couch, drugs making the room swirl. "Never cover your face in front of me again, do you understand?"

Will gave another small nod and Hannibal released the tight grip on his curls, soothing away the small pain with massaging fingers. Will licked his lips and glanced around the room before returning back to Hannibal’s face.

“Have we had this conversation before?” Will pushed himself up from where he was draped over Hannibal’s body and got to his feet, running fingers through his hair as he tried desperately to pull the memory up, wishing to rid himself of his constant battles of *deja vu.*

“And if we have?” Hannibal asked curiously, pushing himself in a more sitting up position on the couch, pushing his shoulders back in a stretch that cracked his spine.

“I...” Will began pacing, his socks sliding against the wooden floor. “I remember snippets, blurbs of things and I don’t know if they are dreams or real or hallucinations.”

“Could I possibly be of service?”

“No offense, but the last time I let you help with my mind, I lost it.” Will shook out his hands as he walked back and forth in front of the fireplace that had long since gone out. “What did you give me? I remember a needle.” His breathing became short and ragged, remembering a time when needles and bright lights were a normal therapy session that he had somehow been convinced into.

“Simply some morphine,” Hannibal replied nonchalantly as if there was no possible other way that he would give Will anything else but the very best medication for his health. “That might be the cause of you being unable to remember.”

Will paused in his steps and glanced over at Hannibal. “I wasn't on morphine for two months. What did you do to me? What aren’t you telling me?”

“I merely kept my promise, Will.” Hannibal rose from the couch and straightened his maroon sweater with a deep breath. “You slept most of the time. It was your body’s way of trying to heal itself. It works better if all other necessary functions are off. The morphine was simply to help with the pain from you having torn your stitches out.”

“You’re still not telling me something, Hannibal,” Will accused, stepping over to Hannibal.

Hannibal gave him a faint smile, took Will’s arms in his hands and placed a grounding kiss to Will’s forehead. “You trust me, don’t you *mylimasis?”* Will opened his mouth, but found nothing coming out. Did he? The internal struggle pulled Will’s chest tightly across his ribs and he had trouble finding breath. After a moment of silence, Will finally gave a nod and a hushed yes. “Then trust me that I will tell you all of the answers you seek in due time. I promise you will know one day.”

“And you keep your promises,” Will whispered with a sigh, disliking the truth in Hannibal’s voice. Hannibal gave a small nod and Will pulled back. “We should probably eat something. Did you want to cook? I believe it is Christmas Eve. Do you ever do something special for that?”

“Not ordinarily,” Hannibal answered as he watched Will step away from him and go to push the couch back to where it had been, putting a shattering end to a lovely day. “I spend the majority of my holidays alone unless I am invited to a dinner party.”

“We don’t have to do anything special.”

Hannibal moved beside Will as he struggled to push the couch and added his strength to it. Will glanced over, shocked at how easily the couch moved back to where it needed to be placed and he was wondering if maybe his adrenaline had made it possible to move the couch last night.

“Did you ever do anything special, Will?” Hannibal straightened up and went to move the side table back to where it belonged.

Will’s hands rested on his hips with a huff of air. “No. Dogs can replace human contact, but they do not give great gifts.”

Hannibal smiled fondly at the comment. “And as a child?”

Will hissed in air through his teeth with a wince. “I don’t know if you’re allowed to ask about my childhood anymore, Dr. Lecter.” Will moved to the now correctly placed couch and picked up one of the blankets, beginning to fold it up.

“Just an honest conversation between friends.”

“Is that what we are?” Will scoffed, reaching for one of the other blankets and watching as Hannibal did the same.

“I would hope by now you would consider us as such,” Hannibal answered in his cool and calm voice, placing the much neater folded blanket on the couch next to Will’s.

“What would you consider us?”

The words made Will’s own hands freeze momentarily, shocked at how easily they slipped from his lips, how easy speaking to Hannibal was now that he wasn’t being required to see him for his work. Will looked up and caught the remnants of a half smile on Hannibal’s lips.

“I do not know if my opinions are what are important in this conversation,” Hannibal said softly, sitting back down on the couch and stretching out his injured leg, massaging at his knee gently. “And you are well aware of how I feel, *caro*.”

Will felt a slight shiver run down his spine at the word, despite not knowing exactly what it meant. Hannibal’s skilled tongue would always make him shiver. He wasn’t sure if he would ever be able to escape Hannibal’s grasp now that they were here. Too tangled. Too muddled. Far, far too mentally close for their own good.

Will knelt down in front of Hannibal and gently pushed his red striped lounge pants up to look over his knee. The bruising still flowered over his leg, the edges now a mustard yellow rather than the violent black and blue the rest of it still was.

“You said you twisted it yesterday,” Will muttered, fingers gently pushing into Hannibal’s knee, trying to feel for the injury, but unsure what he was looking for. “How are you doing?”

“There’s a dull ache,” Hannibal explained, hand reaching out and petting Will’s curls, unable to keep his hands out of them when they were so easily in reach.

“When are you going to start physical therapy?”

“We can do it together. We need to get the movement back into your arm,” the doctor suggested. “After Christmas we can start. Let us just enjoy these first few days.”

Will gave a small nod in agreement, unsure if he could push Hannibal any further. “And your head?” Will questioned, hands now leaving Hannibal’s knee and reaching for the cut that was on his forehead. His thumb traced over it gingerly, the marking rough against his skin.

“Perfectly intact.”

“Good.” Will’s hand dropped to Hannibal’s cheek, thumb stroking across his silver stubble.

The movements were swift, Hannibal’s hand tangled in curls seizing a fistful at the base of Will’s neck and pulling him up, pulling him dangerously close, nose to nose. Will’s breath caught at the movement and Hannibal enjoyed the way that Will’s eyes widened at the suddenness. Hannibal gave a small smirk at the racing breath that controlled Will’s lungs as Hannibal’s lips skimmed over the empath’s. Will tried to push forward, but Hannibal’s held him still by his hair and Will gave a small whimper at the lack of contact.

“Why,” -Will swallowed and licked at his lips in the small space between the two of them- “do you always do this?”

“I’m afraid I need you to explain what you mean, Will,” Hannibal jested, once against brushing his lips against Will’s without making full contact. Will’s hands gripped at Hannibal’s thighs as something to help tether him to the now and not get lost in his head.

“You make me want you.”

“Despite everything?”

“Despite everything,” Will agreed, eyes fluttering shut. “Despite everything you’ve done and everything you are, I want you.”

As if answering Will’s thoughts, Hannibal loosened his grip in Will’s hair and at the freedom, Will jumped forward, mercilessly snatching up Hannibal’s lips with his own. Will’s hands left Hannibal’s thighs and tangled into the red knit sweater, yanking Hannibal closer, his body still hot with fever.

Will rose from his aching knees and straddled Hannibal’s lap without breaking contact, hands quickly moving to Hannibal’s silvering hair and raking through the locks as if his life depended on it, body pressed as closely to Hannibal’s as he could make it.

Will broke the kiss, breathing hard, Hannibal looking just as much at a loss for air as he was. “Are you always this desperate, *caro*?” Hannibal questioned, voice and accent thick.

Will growled and kissed Hannibal again, heatedly, teeth latching onto Hannibal’s bottom lip, harshly pulling on it. “You do that on purpose,” Will hissed through his teeth before biting down on Hannibal’s lower lips again. “Do you have any idea what that does to me?”

Of course you do, you just won’t tell me.

“Tell me, *mon cher*.”

Will moaned and lowered his head to Hannibal’s shoulder, taking one of Hannibal’s hands from his hips and sliding it under the hem of his shirt, resting it against his stomach. Curious fingers traced a deep scar that was raised against smooth skin.

“I feel it here,” Will explained, flattening Hannibal’s hand against him, pulling those wandering fingers away from a wound he would love to leave in the past. “When you speak, it's here and you make my legs go weak.”

“*Ti farò molto di più,”* Hannibal whispered, nipping at Will’s ear. There was a rush of exhilaration in his fingertips as Will’s muscles contracted under his open palm and a shudder went down Will’s spine with a light sigh of breathy air. “*Aš įsitikinsiu, kad prisimeni.*” Another fluttering of muscles and a moan.

“Did you do that for other people too?” Will asked as he kissed at Hannibal’s neck, hands traveling the length of Hannibal’s torso, trying to memorize it. “Did they like it as much as me?”

“*No. Solo per te, caro*,” Hannibal replied. He gave a small gasp as teeth bit into his exposed collar, eyes closing. “Only for you.”

“Promise?” Will pulled back, chest heaving as his breath tried to steady itself. He watched as Hannibal’s eyes opened and focused on him closely, amber alight. “You promise, Hannibal?”

“Greedy little thing, aren’t you?” Hannibal whispered, a hand cupping Will’s cheek. “Are you that desperate to have something of me that no one else has?”

“Hannibal.”

Will’s tone was firm and demanding, making Hannibal smile. He brushed back one of Will’s curls from his face and looked over the empath for a moment longer, fingers tracing over his swollen lips.

“I promise,” Hannibal whispered. “Though you already know that you have every part of me that I’ve hidden away. I’m not sure what a promise like that could mean to you.”

“Everything, Hannibal.” Will leaned forward and placed a gentle kiss to Hannibal’s lips. “Only I should be allowed to know anything about you.” With another small kiss to stunned lips, Will pushed himself from Hannibal’s and went to the kitchen to begin looking through the food that was there, his stomach knotting itself up as the realization of what those words meant flooded his system. He cleared his throat and opened up the fridge. He wasn’t about to let Hannibal dwell on them. “When I was younger my father and I would celebrate Christmas, I suppose.”

He could feel Hannibal’s presence behind him as he entered the kitchen and Will was quick to close the fridge and move to the pantry, not really paying much attention to the items that were in there.

“We never had a tree or anything like that. We moved around too much,” Will continued, feeling Hannibal’s eyes digging into his back. “It was mostly just a gift or two and some crappy gas station sandwiches or turkey TV Dinners for dinner. But we always watched Miracle on 34th Street. Every year, curled up on an old couch, cheap hot chocolate in hand, watching a stupid movie.” Will gave a shrug at the idea. “ He’d sober up, too. Once a year, just for me, he wouldn’t drink for a week. It wasn’t much, but it was... nice.”

“Are you telling me you would like sandwiches for dinner?”

Will snorted and turned with a bright smile at the jab to find Hannibal leaning against the counter, arms folded over his chest. “You can’t tell me that you’ve never just sat down and had a sandwich.”

“Only during my schooling at John Hopkins,” Hannibal admitted, head tipping to the side as he thought several decades back. “It was about the only thing the school served that wasn’t deep fried and I didn’t have the means to eat off campus.”

“What would you like for dinner then?” Will asked, closing the pantry.

“You.”

Will stared, a deep red filling his cheeks and dipping below his shirt. He wanted to hide away, but the earlier commands from Hannibal kept him in place, heart beating like a drum in his chest. Hannibal gave a smirk and pushed himself from the counter, a hand taking Will’s cheek.

“You’re such an obedient boy, aren’t you?” he teased softly, chuckling lightly as Will shivered, eyes closing with a deep breath. He released Will and went to the pantry, opening the door and looking over the items he had had someone get for them. He pulled out some potatoes, garlic, an onion, a large block of chocolate and some beef broth. “How does Shepherd’s Pie sound?”

“With chocolate?” Will asked curiously, heading over to the counter that Hannibal had put his ingredients on. Will pulled the chocolate to him, the block at least a good pound in weight, dark in its deep color.

Hannibal returned to the counter with an array of spices, some lamb, vegetables, worcestershire sauce as well as some sugar, cream, and butter. “The chocolate is for something else,” Hannibal explained, tossing Will an apron and tying his own around his waist, rolling up the sleeves of his sweater. Will tied on his own apron and looked back up as Hannibal passed him a cutting board with a rather large knife, one much larger than anything that Will had been given to use while cooking before. “Can you cut up that bar?”

“The whole thing?” Will questioned, looking back over the chocolate that looked more like a brick now.

“Just some of it is fine. We need about three ounces,” Hannibal answered, coming over with his own cutting board and starting to peel the potatoes skillfully with a knife. Will admired him for a moment, the movements so fluid and effortless. Hannibal chanced a glance over at Will and grinned before returning his attention back to his work. “The chocolate, please Will.”

Will gave an absent nod and put the unwrapped bar on his cutting board, taking the knife and trying to find the best way to angle the blade to cut into the chocolate. Finally deciding on a corner, he pressed into the chocolate, the chocolate breaking into bits across the cutting board.

“Hannibal, I have a question,” Will muttered as he put his weight into the next cut of the chocolate. Hannibal hummed in answer, washing off the potatoes before cutting them into pieces and tossing them into a pot. “When I was trying to solve the Chesapeake Ripper case, you were always going to kill me, weren’t you?”

Will could make out the small pause in Hannibal’s work, sure that anyone else wouldn’t have noticed. “What brings you to that conclusion?” Hannibal asked carefully, as if he didn’t want to walk down this path that Will was taking them. He filled the pot up with water, taking it over to the stove top and putting salt in the water, setting it to boil.

“I was getting close and I know you’re not stupid, Hannibal. You took out Miriam Lass when she found you.” Another loud crack from the chocolate, the knife leaving a red mark down Will’s palm as he pressed into it as leverage. “When were you going to kill me?”

Hannibal was quiet as he began to dice the onion with quick movements that reminded Will of those insane chefs on the internet that somehow still had fingers once they were done working. “When was I, Will?”

Will stopped cutting the chocolate and lowered the knife, letting it sit on the counter. Will closed his eyes and inhaled deeply, playing along with Hannibal’s little game. He let the pendulum swing until he was no longer in a cozy cabin in the mountains and back in Baltimore, Maryland, in an office with a large library and two leather chairs next to a fire.

Will sat with legs crossed, hands folded in his lap, across from himself, in Hannibal’s normal seat. Will rose to his feet and straightened his tie before heading around the desk.

“I make an excuse to go to my liquor bar, whisky glass already laced with gamma-hydroxybutyrate, a drug that will make you immobile, but not render you unconscious. You will be awake and nearly fully aware.” Will poured the respective drinks into the glasses and took them to the patient sitting in the chair. Will sat back in his own chair, sipping at the wine from his glass as the Will across from him downed the two fingers of whiskey quickly. "The drug will make you feel euphoric, after all, I did promise you would enjoy it."

Will placed his wine glass aside on the small glass table next to the chair and leaned forward, elbows on his knees and hands clasped.

"It's a waiting game now, but I have the time. You are my last appointment after all," Will continued on, watching as the Will in front of him slowly showed a face of dislike. "You try not to put any thought to the fact that there's a salty tinge to the whiskey, something that shouldn't be among the oak and smoke."

Will rose to his feet, straightening his tie once more before striding across the space, kneeling beside himself, checking for a pulse at his wrist, finding it fluttering.

"You follow along willingly through the house and down into the basement, my lamb going to my slaughter." Will guided himself through Hannibal's home and to the stairs leading to the basement. When he entered, he found the room cold with medical equipment set up and sterile. "You do not need to worry. I never leave a trace, just my art and you will be my *magnum opus*. You will not be my last, but you will be my greatest. You will be the one that is remembered. After all, it is what you deserve."

Will pushed the other Will onto a stainless steel slab then went to work cutting at his shirt sleeve to add an IV to his skin, then worked on removing the rest of the clothes with a pair of overly sharpened scissors, until Will laid shivering and naked on the slab.

Gloves were pulled over hands, and then there was a caress to the drugged man's face, something akin to love.

"I want you awake," Will continued on, stapping his own hands down with velcro so that he wouldn't grab when the creation began. "I want you here with me until the end, and I will make sure that you are here until the end, when I decide the end is."

Will moved over to where a clear plastic jumpsuit waited on a hanger, pulling it on over his suit and zipping it clear up to his chin, making sure every inch of his body was covered.

Will picked up a scalpel from a small rolling tray stand that he pulled close. He placed the blade at the top of the drugged man's shoulder, dragging the blade down, crimson pouring out and onto the table, being led away by a gutter along the edge of the draining slab. He went to the other shoulder and made a similar diagonal cut that met around his sternum, and then a long drag downwards to complete the Y.

"I open you up and much to my delight, can see the inner workings of your body, the way parts of you move as they perform their function, now in shock from the stress I am causing on your body."

Will's eyes trailed over the different organs that greeted him, stepping around the table in the other direction, only to continue to circle the slab, his reflection's eyes staring at him in pain and surprise, aware of everything that was happening and in no way able to stop it.

"I have a plan. I know exactly what to extract to make you live as long as I can, but you're not frightened enough." With an unnatural rage, Will's hands took hold of the ribcage, his own strength

Hannibal's as he pulled the two halves apart. A sickening cracking filled the basement as the ribs splintered and opened to make room for the other organs to be exposed.

The man on the slab cried out, though no one would hear him. Will would be the only one to ever hear the last breaths of his own lungs in this room underground.

Will reached out and stroked a gloved finger over his beating heart, thrilled at the twitch it made at the contact.

"I will save the heart for last, it will be the last thing you remember," Will said strongly, eyes flickering over his work, making sure that the IV was still working and that the items needed for a blood transfusion were ready to go. "And I will not let you go unconscious on me." Will's eyes met his own and he frowned. "You're still not scared enough. It's not registering."

Will leaned down over the body and kissed at the heart that beat madly from the drugs and adrenaline. The blood was warm against Will's lips and he stood upright, the crimson dripping down his chin.

"I will devour you, you need to understand this. I need you to understand this." Will stepped closer to himself and leaned down once more, placing a deep kiss to the drugged man's lips, slicking him in his own blood. "You're terrified now, your eyes deliciously wide. How alive do you feel?"

With the scalpel still in hand, Will walked back around the table, letting the blood stain his chin and drip onto his plastic covering. He placed the scalpel back on his tray and grabbed two pairs of forceps, clamping them down on either side of the stomach. Scalpel now back in hand, he cut just below the forceps until the stomach was completely detached and he pulled it free, placing it in a box of ice for fresh keeping.

"This is my design."

Will blinked with a deep inhale, frantically looking around until he was able to place himself back in a kitchen, somewhere in New York, making dinner on Christmas Eve. He looked around until he found Hannibal at the sink, draining the potatoes.

"Welcome back, Will," Hannibal said as he placed the now drained pot on a hot pad. There was a warmth to the kitchen and the rich smell of wine and worcestershire mixed together. The chocolate was no longer in front of him but in a bowl, waiting to be used. The knife and cutting board had been removed and beside him in a dish was what looked like a lamb stew, waiting to be topped with the potatoes that Hannibal was now mashing. "Will you please add some butter to these?" Hannibal lowered his fork, wiped his hands on his apron and then went to the fridge to get something else out.

Will's fingers trembled as he took the fork that Hannibal had been using and scooped a healthy portion of butter into the pot. He quickly dropped the fork back into the pot and ran a hand over his snow chapped lips, heart working wildly in his chest, the phantom warmth of blood on his chin.

Hannibal returned with two containers and some sort of herb that Will was pretty sure was dill. "Can I have the cream, Will?" Will glanced around and upon finding the cream, handed it over to Hannibal who poured a healthy portion into the potatoes.

"You're-you're not going to ask?" Will stuttered out, both hands taking the edge of the counter to stabilize himself.

“You would tell me eventually,” Hannibal answered, scooping something that looked like sour cream into the potatoes. “It would weigh too heavily on your mind.”

“You drugged my drink,” Will said with a deep breath. Hannibal didn’t stop working, was simply silent as he pulled at the dill, adding it to the mashed potatoes and waiting for Will to continue. “Something to keep me awake, but unable to fight you, like a date rape drug or something.”

“I am partial to gamma-hydroxybutyrate,” Hannibal admitted, going to rummage in a cabinet for something before coming back. Will looked over and watched as Hannibal started to spoon the potatoes into a piping bag. “You can feel everything through it and if you were to survive, would most likely forget what happened.”

“You promised that I would enjoy it,” Will pointed out with a shake of his head. “I don’t know where I came up with that information. The evidence guides me. I would have had to hear that at some point from you.”

“The night we kissed that you don’t remember,” Hannibal explained, adding careful and dainty piping of potatoes on top of the lamb stew and vegetables.

Will blinked with a questioning look, unsure how the conversation of enjoying his own death had come up, but he pushed it away with a shake of his head. “You strapped me to a draining table and cut me open like they do for autopsies.” Will’s hand went to his chest where his skin had been folded back to expose him. “You broke my ribs open and kissed my heart.”

Hannibal glanced up from his nearly finished work, something like hunger in his eyes as he took in the line of Will’s body. “Did I?” There was a crest of a smile playing on his lips.

“Would you?”

Hannibal straightened up. “It might have occurred to me at some point.” he placed the bag of unused potatoes aside and took the glass dish, putting it in the oven and setting a timer. “Does that concern you?”

“It might have at one point.” Will passed Hannibal the bowl of chocolate when he pointed to it and watched as Hannibal got another pot on the stovetop to keep working. “You don’t frighten me anymore.”

“Pity,” Hannibal muttered softly, adding some sugar and cornstarch to the pot, turning on the heat. “I will have to try harder.”

Will rolled his eyes and watched the way Hannibal’s back moved as he stirred together whatever he was making in the pot. “You then took out my stomach. You were going to take my organs out one by one, keep me alive the whole time.” Hannibal hummed, but Will couldn’t tell if it was in agreement or acknowledgement. “I was going to be your *magnum opus.*” Hannibal glanced behind his shoulder and at Will for a moment with a look that Will couldn’t exactly place.

“Can I have the cream once more, please?” Hannibal questioned.

Will grabbed the carton and passed it over to Hannibal who dumped some into the pot. He then reached into a cabinet and grabbed a dark bottle of vanilla and poured some of that into the pot as well.

“What artwork were you going to base me on Hannibal?” Will asked, stepping up behind Hannibal and wrapping his arms around Hannibal’s waist and hiding his face into the back of Hannibal’s sweater between the man’s shoulder blades. “Was I going to be a classic like the man and woman in Florence or was I going to be an original like Isley?”

“I had pictured using you to recreate The Creation of Adam,” Hannibal described, reaching for the chocolate and putting it in the pot as well. Will watched around Hannibal’s arm as he stirred the concoction together continuously to not burn it as the chocolate melted. “Only your body would be fit for such a thing.”

“Not as God?”

“Adam was painted with such detail it would be a shame for you not to be Adam.” Hannibal pulled the pot from the stove top and Will released him to let him move around the kitchen. The pot was put on a hot pad and Hannibal fetched two mugs from the cupboard before returning and spooning the thick mixture into the cups, something that looked a lot like chocolate pudding. “But, I had other ideas after a time.” He passed Will a mug and Will looked over it for a moment before slowly taking it. “You said your father made you hot chocolate, so I just thought...” Hannibal trailed off, avoiding Will’s gaze and Will couldn’t stop the smile that covered his lips. Was he really this human? This compassionate? This understanding? This... empathetic?

“I feel like you might recall my sketch of Achilles Lamenting the Death of Patroclus,” Hannibal pressed on, taking a small sip of his drink. Will followed suit and Hannibal gave a pleased look as Will’s eyes closed. “Is it ok?”

“More than ok, Hannibal,” Will whispered, lowering the cup from his lips.

Hannibal chuckled at the chocolate that lingered on Will’s lips. He leaned in, kissing Will, tongue trailing over Will’s lips to clean up the mess that Will had left behind. Will sighed against Hannibal’s lips at the contact, feeling empty when Hannibal pulled away.

“You’re incredibly calm for discussing your death,” Hannibal commented, taking another sip from his mug.

“My life is death,” Will pointed out, stepping closer to Hannibal, resting his head against Hannibal’s shoulder just as he had on the cliff top. One of Hannibal’s hands wrapped around Will’s waist, holding him close. “You haven’t answered my question.”

“Original,” Hannibal replied, thumb gently caressing Will’s hip. “My *magnum opus.”*

Will’s mind wandered over all of the firm facts and plausible details that Hannibal always liked to hint to but never confirm. He wasn’t sure what made him so calm around Hannibal now. Maybe it was the acceptance that he was a monster, but becoming this beast’s most treasured masterpiece was an honor that didn’t belong to anyone else and never would belong to anyone else. It was strictly Will’s and always would be. And as odd as it sounded, he didn’t mind the thought.

“I need to rest my knee, Will,” Hannibal whispered, trying not to break the small comfort that was filling the kitchen.

“I can start a fire,” Will offered, pulling back from Hannibal and placing his mug on the counter. “Tomorrow I can go chop up some more wood.” Will left Hannibal in the kitchen, staring after bouncing curls. “Do you have anything to play Christmas music on?” Will shrugged into his coat and stumbled as he tried to tug on his boots to go outside. Hannibal smiled faintly at Will's clumsy movements.

"I'm sure I can figure something out," Hannibal answered, eyes locked on Will as the man went for the door to the deck to gather up some wood for the fire. "When you come back..." Will stopped with his hand on the door knob, turning back at the hanging sentence. "Nothing," Hannibal covered with a wave of his hand. Will gave an unconvinced nod and left the cabin, closing the door behind him and letting a rush of cold air into the house.

Hannibal rested his mug on the counter and wandered over to his things that were still on the dining table, things that Will hadn't touched. His eyes fell on the notebook that he kept all of his notes in, a hard habit to break, but one he once more found necessary. He took the notebook and hid it away in his bag, pulling out the box that he had bought from the antique shop, opening it and looking inside to make sure that everything was still in its place before closing it again and making his way to the piano.

He sat down, placing the wooden box on the bench beside himself, fully debating whether or not he should follow through with his idea. He often didn't second guess any choices once they had been made, but Will had changed all of that. Everything was a second guess with Will. Will was an uncertain anomaly that Hannibal couldn't quite figure out how to navigate, a compass that didn't point north.

His fingers stretched out along the keys, running through the endless sheet music he had stored away in his mind from music lessons in France with a music teacher that taught him more than just music. A teacher he had manipulated into showing him more than music. So much more than music.

The first few notes were simple as all baroque music was until each of its individual parts started and separated into its own melody. The bass started the moving melody until the right hand took over, switching back and forth to make up for the lack of voices in a choir.

The door opened and Will made his way over to the fireplace, placing the logs into the log holder. He stopped and stepped over to the piano, coming to look over Hannibal's fingers moving easily over the keys as if he had been playing this song his whole life.

"The Messiah?" Will questioned, surprised that he knew what it was. "Unto Us a Child is Given?"

"Born," Hannibal corrected, not at all upset about the mistake.

"It sounds a little happy for you," Will commented with a small smile at the complex tune that Hannibal was carrying. He left Hannibal's side and went to start the fire.

"It's the only Christmas music that I do not find atrocious," Hannibal explained with a shrug. "Would you rather I subject us to jingle bells or something of the sort?"

"Can't say that that is my favorite." Will gave a small laugh, matches lighting some newspapers. With the fire finally going, Will returning to the piano as Hannibal began another. The Hallelujah Chorus.

Hannibal glanced up and felt a fond smile over his lips at the snowflakes that were still stuck in Will's curls, lace among copper. There was something beautifully romantic about it that made Hannibal's hands hesitate and a wrong note slip out.

"It always surprises me," Will said, picking up the wooden box he recognized, and taking a seat beside Hannibal, "how imperfect you can actually be. It's so hard to see you as anything other than faultless."

Hannibal's hands lowered from the keys and he flexed them as if they were sore and needed to be stretched out.

"Regardless of what I do, despite how good it is, it will never be faultless." Hannibal's words were mumbled into the room, barely audible. He reached back out for the keys, but fell short at Will's firm concentration on the box. "It's for you," Hannibal explained, starting the Overture of The Messiah, his honest favorite of the oratorio. He made the notes sharp and short, avoiding the sustain pedal so the notes wouldn't carry just as the strings in an orchestra would play it. "You can open it."

Will's fingers trailed over the wood of the box while music still ran through the cabin, the fire crackling in the background while snow fell outside, everything feeling strangely dreamlike and out of a cliché Christmas movie, but Will couldn't bring himself to mind. It was everything he had grown up watching on the TV and everything he never had the chance to experience.

The music stopped and Will looked up at an impatient Hannibal. If it was one thing the man couldn't stand, it was not getting compliments when he did something nice, often fishing for them if they weren't freely given.

Will smiled lightly and unlatched a clasp, opening the lid of the small box. Now that Will saw the contents he desperately wanted to understand how Hannibal had seen the item in the shop from a dirty window.

Fly fishing lures stared back at him, feathers of different colors arranged beautifully. A Red Ibis, a Yellow Mary, a Royal Coachman, and so on. Each one hand crafted and cared for through the years.

"Merry Christmas Will," Hannibal said softly, voice not searching for a compliment in the slightest, just happy to be in the moment. Fingers started on the piano again, this time in a more traditional song, O Come Emmanuel.

Will licked his lips and looked up from the gift. "Thank you, Hannibal," Will whispered, a finger reaching out to caress one of the feathers carefully. He leaned over and placed a kiss on Hannibal's cheek, making Hannibal's hands freeze on the keys, still not used to Will reaching out first. "That was incredibly kind of you."

Will pulled back, looking once more over the gift that Hannibal had put time and thought into.

Hannibal's hand went to his cheek and he quickly cleared his throat, pushing the blush away from his cheeks. "Do you want a drink?" he asked with a dry mouth, getting to his feet and heading over to the bar without confirmation from Will.

He could hear the plunk of random keys being played, a small tune that he had taught Will once upon a time before one of his relapses, the tune obviously still within Will's subconscious.

Hannibal poured their normal glasses of drinks and wandered his way back to the piano, placing the cups down on the edge of the piano before sitting down beside Will.

Will looked up with curious eyes, clearly asking if Hannibal knew how he knew how to play the piano.

"Start again," Hannibal instructed gently, a single hand reaching out to the piano as well.

Will nodded and licked at his lips nervously, playing the first three chords of Clair De Lune before Hannibal added the fourth, a soft lullaby complimenting the falling snow in the nearby window.

"G flat," Hannibal reminded in a whisper as they reached the odd note that Will had always missed.

Will stared as their hands worked together, desperately wishing he knew why he could play. As far as Will could recall, he had never once touched a piano, let alone made anything musical come from the instrument. So how could he play?

Will's heart picked up in his chest as Hannibal's fingers stretched to hit several notes at once, keys further apart than Will could probably ever stretch his fingers.

Will stole a glance up at Hannibal with blushing cheeks and a wrong note on his part quickly broke the simple spell that had Will flushed across every inch of his body.

"Sorry," he whispered softly, hand slipping from the piano.

Hannibal hushed him and moved in to steal a kiss from his lips, but before he had the chance, the timer on the oven went off, signaling that dinner was ready.

Will sighed as Hannibal rose from the bench and took long strides to the kitchen.

Always your cooking, Hannibal, Will thought as he picked up his two fingers of whiskey and sniffed at the cup.

"Gamma-hydroxybutyrate does not have an odor," Hannibal called from the kitchen as if he knew exactly what Will was thinking. "And I did not drug your drink."

Will smirked and downed the drink, simply tasting oak barrels and smoke, no intruding salt.

He set his glass aside, next to his gift, and turned his attention to the guitar that was still sitting in its stand, untouched. Will looked back to where Hannibal was busy plating their food, wishing he could guess if the guitar came with the place or if Hannibal had somehow known and gotten it for him.

Whatever the reason was, Will picked it up, lightly strumming the strings just enough to hear if it needed to be tuned. With a wince, Will quickly went about twisting the pegs until he found a sound that he liked, thoroughly unsure of what any of the notes or strings were called.

First finger, second feet, second string. Second finger, third feet, first string. Third finger, third feet, sixth string.

Will strummed and the chord filled the space, echoing about louder than Will had wanted it to. He could hear the pause in dishes in the kitchen and Will once more blushed, quickly wanting to put the guitar back in its stand and leave it there to collect dust.

“Play something for me?” Hannibal asked, making his way back from the kitchen, dinner forgotten and attention completely on Will.

“You did know,” Will shot at Hannibal who simply shrugged, picking up his wine glass from the piano. “How did you know?”

“Your left hand,” Hannibal answered, taking a mindful sip of his wine. Will looked down at it, wiggling his fingers, trying to see what Hannibal did. “Your fingers are longer and more calloused than your right. This occurs in string players who have to reach extensively for notes. Given your upbringing and your lack of classical training, any orchestral instrument was out of the question. It’s safe to say that you don't know anything about the shamisen or gusle. A guitar would be the only logical conclusion from growing up in the south, to having to travel so much that you needed something portable and the fact that a guitar is far more popular than either a shamisen or a gusle or even a banjo.”

Will blinked, eyes looking over his left hand’s fingers curiously, catching the way that Hannibal took another drink of his wine in satisfaction of his deduction. “I’m not even sure what half of those instruments you mentioned were, and I can’t stand the banjo,” Will explained, his fingers going back to the fretboard.

“Play something for me and then we’ll eat.”

Will sighed. “You’re holding me hostage again? Demanding music before giving me what I want?”

Will was met with a bright smile from Hannibal. “It can be my Christmas gift. I’m not horribly picky.”

“Dante was your gift,” Will grumbled, dragging his thumb over the strings again distractedly.

“Which I paid for,” Hannibal reminded smugly.

“You said I didn’t have to pay you back,” Will prompted with a frown.

“Not with money, no. I wouldn’t expect you to give me something that I have more than enough of,” Hannibal explained, swirling the dark colored liquid in his glass by the stem.

“Manipulating,” Will grumbled lowly, placing his fingers back on the strings. Muttering out loud the positions, hoping he didn’t embarrass himself in front of this man who had learned to play from tutors in France and Venice. “First finger, first fret, fifth and sixth string.”

Hannibal watched curiously as Will’s fingers stumbled over themselves in search of the chord that they wanted. How long had it been since Will had played? Had he ever really been good? Not that Hannibal would mind. He couldn’t play the guitar, doubted he would ever dare to try.

The chord played, buzzing slightly from not enough pressure on the strings from Will’s fingers. Will winced and pushed a bit harder, hitting the chord once more, a clearer sound being produced.

“My father got me one for my birthday one year,” Will clarified. “I taught myself to play from watching videos on the internet, but I don’t really know anything technical or theory related. Just figured everything out by ear after I learned the basics.”

Hannibal admired Will for that skill. Hannibal was good at a great many things, but he had never had an ear for music when it came to playing. He could read sheet music all day long and not have a single issue, but he could not listen to a song and play it without a guide. What another odd gift that the universe had decided to bless Will Graham with.

Will worked slowly, finding each of the chords, his memory fuzzy as he tried to pull the long placed away information back to him. But after a moment or two of struggling, he could switch between the chords proficient enough to hopefully make Hannibal happy.

He hummed along to the song that he was playing, trying to give enough to Hannibal without having to outright sing. He didn't like singing, didn't like his voice and nothing that Hannibal would say would make him think any differently. Especially not when his father sang very loudly and very off key.

"What is that?" Hannibal asked, stepping a little closer to where Will sat on the piano bench, listening to the sad tune.

"Just some stupid song that was on one of Molly's stations in the car," Will replied before returning to his humming.

Hannibal took another swift sip of his wine, trying to quell the jealousy stirring in his stomach at the mention of Will's wife. But there was something that Hannibal could have that she never could. "Sing it for me." Will frowned at the order, his playing stopped completely. Hannibal bit his lip at how demanding the words that came from him were, knowing well that the demands didn't work on Will, and had never worked on Will. "Please?"

Will inhaled deeply, returning to his playing, starting where he had left off. "I've been running from my demons, afraid to look behind. I've been running from myself, afraid of what I'd find."

Hannibal listened carefully to the cookie cutter chords and the simple melody of the tune, but oddly enough didn't find it as horrible as he found any music to be on the radio nowadays. It was beautifully haunting in its lyrics.

"But how am I supposed to love you," Will continued a little louder now, "when I don't love who I am? And how can I give you all of me, when I'm only half a man?" Hannibal took another small step forward. "Cuz I'm a sinking ship that's burning, so let go of my hand. How can I give you all of me when I'm only half a man?"

The song fit Will's voice better than any of the operas that Hannibal had made him learn. His voice was made for effortless, more straightforward pieces where the range wasn't quite so large. Maybe Hannibal shouldn't have tried so hard to mold Will into something he wasn't. Murder was far different from music and each respected their own amount of pushing.

"And no one can ever hurt me like I've hurt myself, cuz I'm made out of stone and I'm beyond help." Hannibal could hear the click in Will's throat as the truth of those words sunk into both of them. "Don't give your heart to me." He paused for a moment, voice thick when he started again. "But how am I supposed to love you when I don't love who I am? And how can I give you all of me when I'm only half a man?" Will licked at his lips, fingers trembling as they changed to a new chord. "Cuz I'm a sinking ship that's burning, so let go of my hand. How can I give you all of me when I'm only half a man?"

With a final strum of the last chord, Will hurriedly put the guitar back on its stand and hand his hands over his face and through his hair. “Can we eat now?”

“Of course,” Hannibal answered with a small nod, unsure what else to do to help Will from having made him so uncomfortable.

“*Voi cittadini mi chiamaste Ciacco: per la dannosa colpa de la gola*,” Hannibal read, finger at the top of the page, ready to turn it when he reached the end. He glanced over at a yawn from Will, who was curled up on the armchair, a blanket wrapped around his body. “*Come tu vedi, a la pioggia mi fiacco.*” Hannibal turned the page and opened his mouth to continue, but stopped at another yawn from Will. Hannibal marked the page with a stray piece of drawing paper and closed the book, setting it aside. “Time for bed, Will,” Hannibal announced kindly, moving over to the armchair with an out held hand to help Will to his feet.

“What time is it?” Will grumbled tiredly, pulling the blanket closer around him like a child would.

Hannibal glanced towards the clock on the mantle, studying it for a moment. “Nearly two A.M. Let’s get you into bed. You didn’t sleep last night.” When Will didn’t move, Hannibal reached down, gently pulling the blanket from Will’s grip, lifting Will from the chair and scooping the empath up into his arms. “Silly boy.”

Will kept his eyes closed, listening to the beat of Hannibal’s heart in his chest as his ear pressed into the fabric of the sweater. Hannibal moved for the stairs, his limp more pronounced under the weight of Will’s body, but at least this time he wasn’t dead weight.

“Your knee.”

“Hush,” Hannibal ordered tenderly, taking the stairs slowly. When he reached Will’s room, he lowered Will into his bed, pulling the duvet out from under Will. His fingers unbuttoned Will’s shirt, pulling it from his shoulders. Next came Will’s pants, leaving Will in his normal t-shirt and boxers for bed. Hannibal folded the clothes and placed them on top of the dresser for Will to deal with in the morning. He moved back to Will, covering the dozing form in the duvet. He placed a kiss to Will’s head. “Good night, Will.”

“Night,” Will got out, nearly completely out of it.

Hannibal closed the bedroom door behind himself and then went back downstairs, busying himself with cleaning up dinner. He washed the dishes, made sure the fire was out and cleaned and the piano was wiped down before he made his way to his own room for the night.

Will’s eyes flickered around the dark, watching the light from under his door for any hints of movement. Soon Hannibal’s footsteps passed the door and the hall light flicked off. He could hear Hannibal’s door close and then the shuffling of the man as he readied himself for bed.

Will waited longer, fingers tight in the sheets, an anxious energy drumming through them. He waited for what felt like eternity, but according to the clock was only about twenty minutes, for the house to settle.

Will pushed out of the covers of his bed and opened his door cautiously, glancing in both directions and finding no life there to be seen, went for the stairs. The moon lit up the house well enough for

Will to make his way through the maze of furniture and to the dining table that no longer had Hannibal's things on them.

Will's heart sunk and he rubbed at his chin, looking around in the dark until he found Hannibal's bag hanging up on a coat rack. It was a long shot, but Will's bare feet silently went down on the hardwood, one right after the other, toe to heel to make sure his steps were noiseless.

That was another thing he had learned living with his father. A drunk dad was a pissed dad. If Will was up past his curfew, then he was punished. And some nights he was sent to bed without dinner, his father forgetting or yelling at him for any small thing he would do, sending him to his room the rest of the night.

Each and every house or trailer that they moved into, Will would take the first day while his father was away working to learn the layout of the house, where the creaks in the floorboards were, if it was better to stay closer to the furniture, to wear socks or go barefoot.

Will opened the bag and dug through it until he found the black leather notebook he had been searching for. He tucked it under his arm and made his way back up the stairs, making sure to step only on the very outside of each landing so that the boards wouldn't make noise under his weight.

Once back and safe in his room, Will closed and locked the door, turning on his bedside lamp, flipping the notebook open to the first page and skimming over the immaculate cursive.

Injuries include stab wounds to the shoulder and face. Both have been stitched. Head trauma, a concussion most likely. Sprained wrist.

Will looked down at both of his wrists and twisted them around curiously, his left feeling a little more stiff than his right.

Possible bruised lung.

Will inhaled deeply, curiously, but there was no pain to indicate that he had been injured. He skimmed the next few pages that were basically about how nothing was happening and how he was under strong sedatives to make sure he slept so his body could heal.

With a bored sigh, Will flipped through the pages, words flying past, most of them unrecognizable in the fanciness of Hannibal's writing. When Will was about to give up, two words caught his eye and he opened to the page that had *smoke inhalation* on it.

The last few days have been difficult. Will is currently still in the hospital on oxygen constantly due to a severe case of smoke inhalation. I have just been released and told that I was lucky my burns weren't worse or covering a larger area. I didn't need a skin graft, but third degree burns do not concern me.

Will blinked, trying to recall having seen any such marks on Hannibal's body from their heart sharing moments and came up empty. Only bruising on Hannibal's knee.

I have been informed that the fire was caused by issues with the wiring in the house, that cunning boy. I am more than aware of Will's actions. He had another relapse , which is becoming more and more constant now.

Relapse? A relapse in what?

He's still on that cliff and I am unaware of how to help him return to the present at this moment in time. Maybe I can try stimulating his senses with something he recognizes.

But what had Will done? He was the cunning boy. Hannibal had called him that before, behind a wall made of clearness.

Will set the fire on the house after he drugged my wine with his own medical supplies. Thankfully he didn't give me enough. I woke and found Will unconscious beside me, hand in mine. The heat was unbearable, thick with smoke. I dragged his body out of the house and a neighbor called for medical help.

Will blinked several times, the memory clear now. That dream was real. All of it had happened. It wasn't that he couldn't get Hannibal out, he had wanted Hannibal there. Wanted both of them dead as he had on the cliff. It was the best thing for them, for Jack, for the world. Two monsters taken out of it before they could hurt anyone else.

Will closed the notebook, regretting having sought it out. He would be up all night, analyzing the dream until it was burned into his mind like he had wanted to be.

He returned the notebook to Hannibal's bag with the same caution and returned to his room, laying on the bed with hands folded on his stomach, eyes searching a ceiling that was being licked by orange flames and thick black smoke.

Chapter End Notes

Poscia ch'io v'ebbi alcun riconosciuto, vidi e conobbi l'ombra di colui che fece per viltade il gran rifiuto- After I had recognized someone I saw and knew the shadow of him who made the great refusal for cowardice.

mylimasis-precious

caro- dear

mon cher- my dear

Ti farò molto di più. Aš įsitikinsiu, kad prisimeni. -I'll do much more to you. I'll make sure you remember.

No. Solo per te, caro- No. Just for you, dear

Voi cittadini mi chiamaste Ciacco: per la dannosa colpa de la gola. Come tu vedi, a la pioggia mi fiacco.-You citizens called me Ciacco: for the harmful fault of the throat. As you can see, in the rain I feel weak.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Gentle. That was the word the monster had used. Will would hold onto that word as if it were the only thing in the universe. Because it was gentle. Each skim of lips and trace of tongue, each brush of fingers and dip of hips were nothing but gently maddening, sending Will so far into himself that he thought he would never be found again, only to be pulled back by books and wine and a weightless timelessness, free of the rules of physics and mathematics.

Chapter Notes

I decided to give you guys two chapters today in celebration of Valentine's Day. It's about time they got to do something romantic and I used the wrong holiday in the last chapter. XD. This is also my first time really writing something like this. I'm not good at smut, so let me know your thoughts. And if you want me to add all the translations next to where Hannibal is speaking let me know and I will update it. Enjoy!

Thanks again to my sister and my wonderful beta, @PitaGonzalezMe on twitter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

LOSING
YOU
TERRIFIES
ME

Will was unusually quiet at breakfast that morning, more quiet than what was normal, Hannibal noted.

Normally it was a calm quiet, something simple and mindless. This quiet was loud and chaotic as if Will couldn't make his brain turn off.

Hannibal paused, lowering his fork and knife to his plate, looking over Will's untouched dish and then back up to Will who had his hands folded under his chin and his eyes dead ahead.

"You seem distracted this morning, *cher*," Hannibal said with a sigh, wiping politely at his mouth before pushing his own food away to turn his attention to Will.

Will blinked several times, being pulled from wherever his mind had decided to take him. He exhaled loudly through his nose and turned towards Hannibal, a hand covering his mouth. "What?" he questioned, voice groggy as if he were still trapped in his thoughts.

"Are you alright?"

Will inhaled deeply, rubbing at his face before lowering his arms onto the table. "Hannibal, you'll tell me the truth when I ask you this, won't you?"

Hannibal leaned back in his chair and nodded, allowing Will to continue with his question.

"The dream I had about the fire really happened, didn't it?"

"Yes."

Will nodded at the direct answer, a little taken aback by Hannibal straightforwardness instead of his normal beating around the bush.

"Take off your shirt," Will instructed, voice cracking in its demand.

Hannibal tipped his head to the side, blinking blankly several times before he rose to his feet. He unbuttoned his vest, pulled it off and folded it, setting it neatly on the table. Next was his tie, draped carefully over the back of his chair. He unbuttoned his shirt, Will watching his fingers work each button out of its cloth trap. Next came the French cuffs and the shirt was placed across the back of the chair as well, the cuffs on the table top.

Hannibal's eyes met Will's watching to see if the man was satisfied, but Will still watched intently, waiting for Hannibal to continue. Hannibal obliged, pulling his undershirt over his head so he was bare chested and faced Will, waiting for what Will was going to do.

Will's eyes trailed the length of Hannibal's body, expression discontent. "Turn around," Will instructed.

Hannibal had never wanted not to do something more in his whole life, but if Will was remembering, then he had to help Will remember, despite how painful the memory was. And they had had five good days in a row, which was rare. He would do anything to make Will whole again.

Will watched as Hannibal slowly turned around and Will got to his feet at the sight of what looked like a bleached patch of skin that covered up half of the brand that was left behind by Mason Verger. Something raised and scared. Something Will had failed to discover when he had been exploring Hannibal's body previously.

Will reached out with a shaky hand, but stopped himself, unsure on if it was appropriate to touch or not. He didn't have permission. He was being presumptuous. Even with as much touching as Hannibal had been allowing Will, this was something different. Something deeply wounding and personal.

Hannibal waited, taking in Will's hesitation for a moment. "You can touch it, if you would like. It doesn't hurt anymore." He waited in the anxious air until he could feel Will's calloused fingers press against the skin at his back, searching, exploring. He let out a breath he didn't know he had been holding as Will's fingers grew more confident.

"I'm so sorry, Hannibal," Will's voice choked out. "This is my fault. All my fault."

"Will," Hannibal muttered, glancing over his shoulder to see tears brimming the empath's eyes. "It's alright."

"It's not alright," Will hissed through his teeth. "What on God's green earth would make this alright? Even if you are a sadist or a masochist, this is not alright and I," -Will pointed to himself and swallowed hard- "I did this to you."

Will's hands dropped to his sides and Hannibal turned to see a single tear roll down Will's scarred cheek. He swiftly wiped at it and sighed, licking his lips with a sniffle.

"I wish I could remember it happening. There's flashes of it and I know what I did, but I have no timeline to put it in and-and..." Will trailed off, rubbing at his elbow, with his face turned away from Hannibal.

"Before the apartment in New York," Hannibal offered, reaching out for his undershirt to pull it back on. Will's hands stopped him and he stepped behind Hannibal to once more look over the flesh that was flamed licked. "We were in a house in Maine. You liked it there." Hannibal could feel those curious fingers once again touching the sear, running over his right shoulder blade, outlining where the burn met unscarred flesh.

"Did I?" Will whispered, his breath ghosting over Hannibal's skin from how close he was.

Hannibal shifted as Will's fingers dipped over and between each of Hannibal's affected ribs as if he were playing a glockenspiel and each bone was a note.

Hannibal considered the question, weighing whether to answer it or to just let it be. He could tell Will about the house. That wouldn't harm him. "You liked to sit by the window that overlooked the coast. You could see a lighthouse from the window."

"You had drawings of the lighthouse in the apartment," Will muttered, fingers now dropping down to Hannibal's hip, caressing his hip bone where the burn still stretched. "They were beautiful." *You're beautiful.*

"Yes," Hannibal confirmed, eyes closing as Will investigative fingers paused and were replaced with a small kiss. Will's lips were soft, stubble dragging against Hannibal's delicate skin as Will moved back up his body, placing more kisses to the pain he had caused. Hannibal's hands took the edge of the dining table for balance as Will's fingers dug into his hips to keep him in place. "Will..." he sighed.

Each kiss held a sadness to it, an apology, something haunting and dark. Hannibal could feel something hot touch his skin that quickly cooled and he scrambled to try to name what it was, until he heard a small sob in Will's throat. Tears...

Will's hands trailed up the front of Hannibal as he continued his kisses higher, over Hannibal's ribs and eventually to his shoulder blade, fingers tangling into Hannibal's chest hair, pulling Hannibal closer to him, holding him tightly, hiding his face once more between the man's shoulder blades.

Hannibal could make out the movements of Will's face as he tried to hold back his tears that were still falling across Hannibal's skin. He let Will cling onto him, just as Will had when they were crashing towards the Atlantic. Frightened gripping, jittery muscles, panicky breaths.

"Will," Hannibal whispered gently, hands reaching up and unlocking Will's from himself. He turned and took Will's face in his hands. "Look at me, Will," Hannibal instructed, voice simply a breath.

His thumbs wiped away the tears on Will's cheeks and Will shook his head, hands taking Hannibal's wrists, fingers stuttering when they found the scars there, the scars he had put there as well. His own design. *This was all my design.*

"Look at me, *brangus berniuk."*

When Will finally obeyed, the look that Hannibal gave him... Those alive maroon eyes probed deep into Will's soul, desperately wanting to see everything there. His compassion burned stronger than any pain that had corroded Will's heart.

The maroon look told Will, *I know something's not alright; and when you're ready, we can work it out together.*

There was a realization that Will wasn't alone, and that Hannibal wouldn't judge him... Harshly. Not like Dr. Chilton or Dr. Bloom. Hannibal was there to help, just as he had promised. Always there to help, though the help was more than naught unorthodox.

Will inhaled deeply and gave a small nod, fingers tracing the scars on Hannibal's wrists, pulling them up to kiss them as well. Kiss his revenge, kiss his illogical thinking, kiss his design.

"Hannibal, you have to promise me something, if I tell you about something I've done," Will muttered against Hannibal's wrists. "Promise not to be mad."

Hannibal didn't have to guess. He had his suspicions. He could hear Will in the middle of the night and knew that Will wasn't really asleep when Hannibal had carried him to bed. Hannibal pulled himself free from Will's grasp, unsure if he wanted to hear Will's confession.

He took his undershirt and pulled it up over his head and then reached for his dress shirt. "You read my notes," Hannibal said, straightening the sleeves down before beginning to button them up. He had had this conversation before, had found it much easier to be direct than to try to hide anything from Will.

"Not all of them," Will muttered, his tone hurt, but Hannibal did his best to ignore the pain in them, to push his own empathy down just as he did whenever he was killing. It was so difficult for Hannibal to do that with Will though. Not when Will was so empathetic of him. "I'm sorry."

"Curiosity is normal." Hannibal straightened his sleeves, adding the cuffs back in before reaching for his tie. When he faced Will again, he could see an ashamed little boy, lost and damaged. "What we do with it is another matter entirely."

"I just wanted to understand," Will supplied, voice rising in volume. "I just wanted something to make sense. I don't know if I can keep living with these fragmented dreams, but I don't know if I want to know everything that I've tried to do to you, because I've obviously done a lot."

"The fire was the worst of it," Hannibal said, sitting back down and pulling his plate back, cutting into his Hangtown Fry. "I wouldn't worry about it. Everything has been corrected for the time being. Please sit and eat."

"You wrote that I kept thinking we were at the cliff. I don't remember anything until waking up in that apartment." Will stepped closer to Hannibal, praying that somehow the man would take pity on him and answer his unspoken questions. *You know exactly what I'm asking, Hannibal.* "Help me," Will whispered, hands twisting in each other. "Please."

“Go read the rest if you would like to know.”

Hannibal wanted to take back the words as soon as he said them and he gave an odd look at the feeling he had never experienced before. He had never wanted to erase anything he said from the world, but there was always a first. Will was full of firsts.

“Hannibal.”

Hannibal lowered his silverware and rubbed at his face with a deep breath. He didn’t want to do this. He didn’t want to have this conversation again. Not ever again. It was draining and painful. How many times had he already had it? At least a dozen. He hadn’t kept track, afraid it would just make him further depressed than he was each time he had to relive this same conversation.

And it always turned out the same. Every single time it was the same. Will would leave out of anger, Hannibal would have to bring him back to protect him, and then maybe there would be another day or two of completely uncomfortable and irritated silence before the reset.

Stress seemed to be a large factor in the reset. Remembering everything too quickly or being told and possibly wanting to forget. Maybe Will was doing it to himself. Memory suppression was not common, but it was something that one could learn to do and maybe Will didn’t know he was doing it to himself.

He just kept closing down the neural connection, intentionally forcing himself to forget something that was too much for his mind to handle and eventually he wouldn’t remember. It was how habits were made and broken. You disrupt the pathway in your mind and rewire it into a different direction. Maybe... But it was all maybes. No one really knew how the mind worked or how it dealt with trauma and it wasn’t abnormal to suppress the memories of any form of trauma.

“Please.”

Hannibal rose from his seat at the beg, the same beg he had heard many times before, wishing that for once he could hear it in a much more pleasant aspect than in this same situation that was like a recurring nightmare.

But Hannibal deserved it, didn’t he? God’s fun little punishment for Hannibal because the law couldn’t catch him, because Hannibal wasn’t unlike a god himself, though much more demonish than draped in glory. Somehow perfectly perfect in all aspects, always knowing the right thing to say, the right thing to do in any given situation. But God had given Hannibal Will on a silver platter. Will, who was never the right thing, never the right situation, never what he should be. And maybe that was why Hannibal was so attached. Will was always something that Hannibal could never predict and never wanted to be able to.

God was funny, after all. Powerful killer and unjust. God liked to play with Hannibal just as Hannibal played with the living on earth. Will was a distraction, a game, something made just for Hannibal. An angel, just for him to get drunk on rose water, corrupt and suffocate with his own halo if Hannibal so pleased. An angel that could keep up with Hannibal’s mind, surpass him at times. An angel that would bewilder and capture and trap and train. Something to finally ensnare the devil himself and turn him into something else.

Hannibal moved past Will, motioning the man to follow him. Will did as instructed, following Hannibal to the living room, sitting beside the killer on the couch. Hannibal stared ahead, eyes fixed pointedly on the fireplace as he leaned forward, elbows on his knees, hands fists, supporting his chin.

Will waited quietly, not wanting to interrupt whatever Hannibal was thinking about, the silence between them more jagged than it normal was. Will watched Hannibal's face curiously, noting each twitch of a muscle or frown, this conversation obviously being one that Hannibal didn't want to have.

"You suffered a decent amount of brain trauma after our fall," Hannibal finally offered with a deep sigh, though he didn't move from his position and didn't look over at Will. "You took the brunt of the hit with the water. Since then you have had a form of amnesia that I can not seem to diagnose. Your mind will reset, send us back to the top of that cliff before we fell. It's not a predictable pattern. Sometimes you can go several days, sometimes it is a daily occurrence."

Hannibal's hand rubbed at his jaw and he sat up with a straight back, still not meeting Will's burrowing gaze as the man listened in silence.

"I wake up each morning wondering if you are going to be kind and gentle, clumsy Will, or that monster I unleashed in you."

"I try to kill you," Will muttered softly. It wasn't a question, not really. More of a breath of truth that Will put between them.

"Often. But the fire was the worst of it. I don't think you had fully reset during that one. I think the memories returned too quickly and you couldn't process them," Hannibal continued to explain. "You had to escape."

"How many times have you kissed me?" Will found himself asking.

This brought Hannibal's attention to him and he wore a puzzled expression as if this wasn't how these conversations usually went. Hannibal had distanced himself as quickly as he could from Will after fully verifying that Will had read the notebook without permission, but now he found Hannibal opening up their normal connection, not so rigid and harsh in the line of his body.

"Not often," Hannibal admitted, voice small. "I was never sure what would upset you. I wanted to keep you for as long as I could. If I could keep your mind with me, then I would risk it, but this is honestly the longest moment I've had with you yet."

"Almost a week?" Will questioned, eyes wide. "I've never been with you longer than five days?" Hannibal shook his head, running his fingers through his hair, pushing it back and behind his ear.

"I'm scared to let you sleep at night," Hannibal disclosed with a clearing of his dry throat. His heart pounded in his shirt and he was sure that Will would be able to see it despite all of the layers that he wore. He inhaled deeply again. "I have tried keeping you awake as well. It doesn't help. If I don't let you sleep, I get roughly twenty six hours before you reset."

Will struggled with the information that was being handed to him and he lowered his head into his hands as he tried to file it away, hopeful that this time maybe it would stick. Begging to any cosmic being or god that he wouldn't forget, that this time he could hold on.

"How many times have we had this conversation?" he asked in a voice barely above a whisper.

“Enough.” Hannibal reached out and placed a cautious hand to Will’s knee, giving it a squeeze.

“Maybe this time will be different,” Will suggested, looking back up at Hannibal whose face was stone cold, but eyes curious for the insight. “You said that this is the longest you’ve ever had with me. Maybe-Maybe I will remember. Maybe this time I won’t-”

“You will,” Hannibal interrupted, voice icy and clinical, making Will’s mouth go dry.

Adrenaline flooded Will’s system, pumping and beating as if it were trying to escape. His heart might have been doing the same thing as it pounded in his chest making Will nearly certain it was going to explode. He wanted to run, wanted to hide, wanted to-wanted to...

The adrenaline surged so fast that Will felt as though he was going to vomit, saliva thickening in his throat and beads of sweat trickling down his brow. No, he had to stay calm. Hannibal said it was from a mental overload of some sort.

Don’t let your mind run away with you, Will, he ordered himself with a deep breath to push the queasiness away.

“I don’t want to forget,” he gasped out, breathing hard. Concern flooded Hannibal’s features. “Please, don’t let me forget.” It was a broken plea, one that Hannibal had no control over. One he wished he did control. Will was the first thing since his sister’s death that he hadn’t been able to control or manipulate in some way and it bothered him, made him anxious, made him desperately want to protect Will more than ever before. “Make me remember.”

“How, Will?” Hannibal asked. “If you have any suggestions, I would gladly take them, because I have none of my own. I’ve exhausted all of my expertise.”

“Memories are tied and triggered by stimulus. Taste, touch, sound, smell,” Will explained, shaking out his curls and making them go wild as he got to his feet. “I can remember a very specific camping trip that I took without my father’s permission each time I smell pancakes.”

“What exactly are you suggesting, Will?”

“Hannibal, I want you to...” Will trailed off, eyes flickering around the room absently as he tried to find the words that he needed, tongue held tightly between his teeth as he thought. “I want my senses overloaded and my mind shut off. I want to drown in you until I can remember everything because I can’t bear forgetting this. Even if I can’t remember it, the sentiment will always be the same. Losing you terrifies me and even the idea of forgetting you is making my anxiety skyrocket.”

“Will-”

“Make love to me, Hannibal.”

Hannibal’s face twisted into one of disapproval and Will tried to push down the rejected and betrayed feeling that collapsed his lungs. He went over to the couch and dropped to his knees in front of Hannibal, taking the older man’s hands.

“You love me. You didn’t lie about that?” Will pushed.

“I love you,” Hannibal agreed, with a twitch a smile in the corner of his lips. “But-” He broke off, biting his bottom lip between his teeth and Will’s brows furrowed questioningly. “I wanted to wait.” He gave Will a small smile, resting his forehead to Will’s. “*Mylimas berniukas*,” Hannibal sighed. “I don’t want you to forget what we do.”

“Then make me remember,” Will said strongly. “Sear yourself into my skin so that I can’t forget.”

This was different. So utterly different from any way this conversation had previously gone that Hannibal was trapped in shell-shock, unsure what exactly to do, not sure if he should give into Will’s wants or keep his own rules.

It wasn’t that he didn’t want Will. He always wanted Will, had always wanted Will since their first conversation, since Will made eye contact after saying how distracting eye contact was. And that was what made Will his *magnum opus*. Clever, cunning Will who got far too close and now far too tangled. He was special and even in self preservation, Will would stay special to Hannibal. Now it was different, though. There was no self preservation, not anymore. Now all of his focus was on Will’s preservation.

“You have no idea what falling in love with you feels like,” Hannibal whispered, closing his eyes. “You don’t know what it’s like to lose you.”

“You won’t lose me. Not anymore. Not ever again.”

“You can’t promise that.”

“I promise, Hannibal,” Will assured softly. “And I never break my promises.”

Hannibal stood slowly from the couch, pulling Will up by his hands. Hannibal’s eyes flickered over Will’s face taking in the beg in Will’s brilliant tempera blue eyes. With a small, surrendering nod, Hannibal pulled Will to the stairs and up to his room, guiding Will inside.

Will turned around to face Hannibal and Hannibal’s strong hands took Will’s hips, guiding him to the bed. The back of Will’s knees hit the edge of the bed and he fell backwards, collapsing into the plush duvet.

“Get comfortable, *mon cher*,” Hannibal instructed softly, fingers working on the buttons on his vest.

Will adjusted himself until he was at the headboard, head on the downy pillow. He inhaled deeply of the scent Hannibal had left across them, trying to imprint it to memory. Anything to ground him to this very moment for eternity. At a dip in the bed, Will glanced up to see Hannibal in his dress shirt, French cuffs taken out in hopes of preserving the sleeves.

He crawled over the top of Will, hands on either side of Will’s head, eyes intense in the dim room. Will raised one of his hands and caressed Hannibal’s face with the back of his fingers. Hannibal leaned into the fleeting touch.

“What about your knee?” Will asked softly.

“Shh,” Hannibal hushed, kissing Will deeply, causing Will’s head to spin. “This is all about you. Don’t think about anything but how this feels. Do you understand?” Will gave a small single nod.

"I promise to be gentle with you. *Taigi švelnus.*" Will sighed as the words cradled against his lips, foreign in their taste.

"Hannibal," Will managed to get out through the fog that was beginning to set into his mind. A blush filled his cheeks and pulled him to be more present in the waiting silence. "I've never... done this." Will could feel his heart speed up at the confession. "With a man."

"*Tyla, mano mylimoji*," Hannibal whispered, once again pressing a firm kiss to Will's mouth. Will whimpered into the kiss, eyes rolling back, fingers searching across the fabric of the duvet, for what he wasn't sure. Hannibal licked into Will's mouth, greeted with a moan and the heat of Will's own tongue.

Will shivered against Hannibal's kiss, letting himself fall into it, letting his senses try to take in every taste and every touch. Fingers reached out to Hannibal, finding the top most button on Hannibal's shirt, beginning to work it open.

The smell of books and wine was overwhelming, filling Will's lungs with each breath he was able to steal between the kisses being pressed to his swollen lips. Hannibal's longer silver locks tickled Will's cheeks, brushing across a fresh scar. With Hannibal's dress shirt tossed to the floor, left to wrinkle, fingers pressed into his chest, fabric separating Will from the touch he wanted, wanting nothing more for Hannibal to make him weightless, timeless, free of the rules of physics and mathematics for once in his life.

And the monster obliged, as if he could read thoughts. Will's own monster. A kinder monster than what Will had ever once experienced before. A strength hidden inside a human body, a strength unlike any Will had ever seen in his life.

Hands that had snapped bones without a second thought, stripping his body clear of fabrics in worship. Fingers that had found pulses and either brought them back to life or smothered them completely, travelling over freshly exposed skin. Lips and tongue that had partaken in the delicacies of a palette that very few else had discovered, a diet of perverseness, kissing and tasting at his neck and shoulders.

Gentle. That was the word the monster had used. Will would hold onto that word as if it were the only thing in the universe. Because it was gentle. Each skim of lips and trace of tongue, each brush of fingers and dip of hips were nothing but gently maddening, sending Will so far into himself that he thought he would never be found again, only to be pulled back by books and wine and a weightless timelessness, free of the rules of physics and mathematics.

What a God forsaken mess Hannibal was making of him, lips sinking lower, pressing kisses to his chest, leaving behind blooming roses of a delicate blush. An idiotic moaning fool that could barely breathe. Ruins of a man already so ruined, Will wasn't sure how Hannibal was making him anymore of a disarray.

Fingers pulled at the remaining fabric at Will's hips, lips swiftly heating the skin that was assaulted with cold air, leaving Will gasping and arched off the bed. Hands pressed Will back into the mattress, lips drunkenly trailing over a scar.

Each of the two of them matched now, marked by each other until the day that they died, which would possibly be soon if Hannibal kept up his maddening caresses. Each touch across his scar was just as burning as the knife had been. The taste of blood was sharp against Will's tongue before it was kissed away by Hannibal, a nightmare that could be revisited later in time, not now. Not when this moment was so excruciatingly, torturously perfect.

“*Tokia graži mano meilė,”* Hannibal rasped in Will’s ear, breathless.

“Please,” Will moaned shamelessly, fingers pulling at Hannibal’s undershirt.

“*Pasakyk man, ko tau reikia*,” Hannibal instructed with a nip at Will’s ear.

“Too many clothes,” Will answered, only able to guess at what Hannibal had said.

A coldness consumed Will’s skin in a shiver as Hannibal’s weight left him and he watched through frosted glass eyes as Hannibal removed his shirt and then began working on his belt. Will’s breath hitched as the leather was pulled free and left to fall to the floor just like the rest of their clothes. Pressed slacks were quick to follow, though Hannibal made no movement to remove his boxers.

He leaned himself back down over Will and Will was about to complain about Hannibal not finishing when a hot tongue licked a stripe up his length. Will’s fists clenched around the duvet and his back arched, eyes closing with a groan he didn’t give permission to escape.

Will’s chest heaved and he licked at dry lips, waiting for whatever was coming next. The sound of a bedside table drawer being opened and closed covered up Will’s harsh breath, until there was a dark and smothering kiss placed to Will’s parted lips, clawing the air from his lungs.

“Spread your legs for me, *mielasis*.”

Will did as prompted, a jolt of vulnerability lighting up his veins as Hannibal’s hands guided him further open, blush painting over his cheeks and chest like brush strokes across a canvas.

The monster’s claws trailed lines up the insides of thighs and sent shivers to Will’s core. The memories of kisses now traced in his pale skin in the back of his knees and thighs. There was a satisfied air that came with Will’s whimper of not being touched where he needed to be.

“Please,” Will begged.

Hannibal didn’t need to be told twice. Not today. Not in this moment. If there were more times in the future, he would make Will beg and plead for each and every touch, but not today. Today was Will’s and it would stay Will’s. Anything Will asked for or wanted. Anything.

Hannibal opened the small bottle of slick and put some on his fingers, warming the liquid between his fingers before reaching out to Will and carefully touching at the man before, leaning down to once more lick at Will to help ease the unfamiliar feeling his fingers would be creating.

Gentle. Hannibal was going to kill him with gentle, smother him until it was all he knew. And wasn’t that exactly what he had wanted? Exactly what he had asked for? Pleasure? Gentle pleasure to drown him out completely, to ease his racing mind, to wipe away everything that he had done until he was nothing, until he remembered everything?

A finger pushed in and Will hissed. Hannibal was swift to anchor him to the bed with heavy kisses, his other hand stroking his length to pull his mind to something more pleasant than the slight burn.

“Don’t think about what’s outside of this room,” Hannibal whispered against Will’s lips, carefully stretching and working Will with his other hand. “Don’t think about tomorrow.” Will gasped, fingers snatching at Hannibal's hair to pull him back in for another kiss. "Or a week from now." Moans, breath from Will's lungs clinging to the heat of the room. "Just be here with me now, *Mano mylimasis*." A second finger met the first and Hannibal kissed a sigh from Will's lips, enjoying the way Will's fingers tugged at his hair. "Think about me."

That's all I can think about, Hannibal .

"Think about how much I love you."

I love you, Hannibal.

Smothering lips, blocking away any answer, impeding any thought. The shakiness in his limbs, the fuzziness in his head, his heart beating heavily against his rib cage, drunken with delusion.

Will found himself paralyzed by Hannibal's words, every limb drugged by the chemicals washing through him, natural rather than manufactured. A burst of stars and lightning as fingers touched something in him that he had never felt before.

"Hannibal," Will whimpered, fingers tightening in Hannibal's hair. It was too much. It was too warm, too perfect, too pure. And Will wanted to remember every second of it. He wanted to store every bit of this to memory. Every breath, every moan, every touch.

"Good, *mielasis*?"

Will forced his eyes open to meet Hannibal's and a shiver raced through him. God, he wanted to remember this. He wanted to remember the contrast of Hannibal's silver hair against his red hot face. Will pushed himself to memorize the blush that spread across Hannibal's bare chest, the beating of his own heart, the soft energy behind those amber eyes. He would do anything, destroy anything and everything, just to keep those eyes on him.

"Good," Will said when he finally found the strength to. "More."

Hannibal placed a soft kiss to Will's lips before moving back down his body, leaving Will cold and wanting more contract. The heat wasn't lost for long, returning to Will in a blaze at a wicked tongue and impossible lips.

Will wasn't sure how long he could hold on with fingers exploring parts of him he didn't know existed and Hannibal's hot mouth on him. Will's hips jumped as that place was touched once more inside of him and he could feel strong fingers grappling his hips down so he couldn't move. Trapped in place, forced to feel every minute movement, every last nerve ending on fire with what Hannibal was doing to him.

Heat pooled low in Will's stomach, under Hannibal's palm and he found his hands trembling where they were still tangled in Hannibal's hair. *Not like this,* he thought, though the words evaded him. *Please, not like this Hannibal.*

Ever attentive animal, Will's monster. So careful of Will's wants and needs. So observant and willing to please, Will's monster. Pulling away before it was too much, kissing away Will's whines at the emptiness that was now there. Giving and giving and giving, Will's monster. Wine and books and blood and death, Will's monster. Darkness blurring with the light, Will's loving, perfect monster.

“*Atsipalaiduok, mano meile,”* Hannibal’s accent pushed into the fog of Will’s mind. Searing lips at his forehead. “Can you do that for me, *Mano brangiausias*? Relax and let me take care of you.”

“Hannibal.”

That was all Will could say, the only thing that would tumble from his lips. The only logical thought that he had, swirling endlessly through each of his senses. Everything he had asked for. Everything that he had wanted. To taste, hear, smell, see and touch Hannibal and be immersed so deeply in everything that was Hannibal that he would never forget. He refused to forget. Even if this was all he had at the end of the universe, Will would remember. Will would always remember this.

Will watched as Hannibal stood from the bed, finally removing the last bit of fabric that had been between them for far too long. Will licked at his dry lips as Hannibal added slick to his own length and Will quickly closed his eyes, embarrassment flooding over him.

“Are you still wanting this Will?”

The words were soft and kind in the mist that cradled Will. Will could only think to nod, knowing that the only word he would be able to say would be to call his monster’s name.

There was a dip in the bed as Hannibal returned to Will’s parting Will’s legs once more to move between them. “*Pažadu būti švelnus, brangus.*” Will shuddered at the words and he could feel the pride in the smile his monster gave.

Hannibal’s weight pressed into the bed, chest to chest, kissing at Will’s jawline. Will’s neck extended, giving Hannibal more room to work. Lips pressed to a racing pulse and kissed at it, worshiping the life force it gave, not threatening to take it away for a moment. Hannibal’s heat was between Will’s legs and he struggled to keep his mind focused on Hannibal and not letting himself dissolve into the warmth and the weight of who was above him.

“Hannibal,” Will breathed, fingers once more in those silver locks, anything to ground himself, stable himself, keep him in this very moment so he could catalogue every feeling.

“Anything is yours, Will,” Hannibal said against Will’s rushing blood. “You only have to ask.”

Will circled his arms around Hannibal’s shoulders, shaking his head, unsure if you could find the words, unsure if he would ever be able to say anything other than that one name ever again.

“Ask, *mylimas*,” Hannibal instructed. “I need to know what you want.”

Will pushed through the fog, through the heat in his veins, to the top of his mind. “Show me love, Hannibal,” Will gasped out.

With a last kiss to Will’s neck, Hannibal sat up a little more, eyes searching pleading blue. “*Švelnus. Taigi švelnus.”*

Gentle. The push, the stretch, the burn. Gentle. The extinguishing kiss. Gentle. This monster.

Will whimpered as his nails dug into Hannibal’s back, finger tips catching at brands and burns. Hannibal’s sigh filled the kiss and Will swiftly put that sound away, chaining it to the foyer is the Norman Chapel in Palermo next to Hannibal’s heart, severe and beautiful and timeless.

Will’s legs naturally wrapped around Hannibal’s waist, pulling him closer, wanting everything this man had to give him. Even if it hurt, Will wanted it. Every moment of pain was theirs to explore and there was not going to be a time without pain between them and Will didn’t want there to be. The pain was theirs and it should stay that way.

The pace that Hannibal set was slow and deep, so damn gentle. It only made Will’s fingers dig deeper into Hannibal’s back as he forced himself to stay present. The way that Hannibal worshiped him with a reverence that would make God jealous was suffocating.

Will didn’t deserve it. He had never deserved this before, but his soul was a light and more alive than it had ever been and he didn’t want to lose it. Anything to feel something more than just himself.

A hand reached down between them and Will's breath was trapped in his lungs as Hannibal stroked his length in time to those agonizingly slow thrusts, delirium overtaking Will. Dizziness put Will on the edge of life and death, teetering and waiting for Hannibal to save or destroy him.

“Please, Hannibal.” Will’s sanity was slipping, everything blurring together. Nothing was separate anymore. Touch collided with scent, dangerous fingers drunk on expensive wine. Bleeding hearts and pulsing lips. A coiling in his stomach and a rushing in his ears. “I can’t-I can’t...”

Will moaned at a slightly harder snap of hips, the pace faster, but not brutal. Gentle, as gentle as Hannibal had been the whole time. Adoration, praise, devotion. It was blinding, stealing away Will’s breath.

“Let go, Will,” Hannibal instructed in his ear before sealing Will’s lips into a kiss.

Nails scratched red marks deeply into Hannibal’s back. Will felt the coil snap, making him gasp into Hannibal’s mouth. Careful fingers and thrusts pulled Will through his release until Hannibal followed after him.

The kisses that followed were desperate and starved from Hannibal, sending Will’s mind spinning, as if Hannibal were trying to overload his senses more than he already had. “Don’t forget this Will,” Hannibal whispered, pulling away. His fingers pushed Will’s damp curls from his face. “I couldn’t bear it.”

“The landlord said that two men were living here,” Zeller explained, reading over the statement he had written down in his notepad. Jack stepped around the empty apartment that had been cleaned top to bottom so that there was nothing left for them to find. “She said that one of them was older, greying and charming with an accent. Paid for rent in full, in cash, and had already paid rent for the next three months in advance. She said that the other was sickly, hardly ever left the apartment but was always accompanied by the charming man whenever he did leave. The man never spoke and she thought he was possibly high, he was always out of it.”

“There’s no DNA, no money or electronic trail, nothing to connect them to this apartment,” Price continued with a deep sigh. “Just like normal. You can’t prove it was them Jack.”

“Like hell I can’t. That bedroom looks like Italy threw up on it,” Jack defended. “Only Hannibal Lecter would splurge on such a thing.”

“The renovation was not approved by the landlord,” Zeller said, closing up his notepad and putting it into his jacket pocket. “She said that she didn’t even know that it had taken place.”

“Is there anything else useful in this place?” Jack grumbled, rubbing a hand over his face. As much as he wanted to believe he was on the right path, both Price and Zeller were correct. There was no definitive proof that Will and Dr. Lecter had been here, just circumstantial evidence. Nothing concrete.

His hand dropped and Jack stopped, lowering himself to his knees in the kitchen. He pulled a pair of latex gloves from his pocket and reached under the cabinet, picking up a shard of glass from an expensive looking china plate. A dark brown was along one edge.

“There’s blood on this,” Jack announced, holding out the piece of glass. Price hurried forward, pulling an evidence bag from his pocket and opening it up. Jack dropped it into the bag and smirked. “Let’s get this back to the lab and get it tested. You boys can go home, spend time with your families.”

“Jack,” Price cut in with a frown. “We want to find him just as much as you do.”

“We’re not leaving,” Zeller agreed.

“Merry Christmas,” Jack said in a dismissive tone that made both of the men fall silent with nods, leaving Jack to be alone in the apartment. Jack sighed and stepped over to the large open window, watching snow as it drifted lazily onto the city. “I will find you,” Jack muttered to himself. “You will slip up. You can’t hide forever. How did you get out of here without being seen? Without being traced?”

Jack quickly turned and left the apartment, locking the door behind him so it wouldn’t be disturbed and raced down the stairs to the front desk where the landlord was. A woman in her late 60’s, blond hair going grey at the roots.

“Do you have any security footage of the front of the apartment?” Jack questioned, making the woman jump from the paperwork she was going through. She gave a small nod in answer. “I need to see the day that they left here.”

The woman lowered her paperwork and went over to her computer, messing around for a moment longer than Jack liked, though he tried to keep his mouth shut, both his own wife and Beverly telling him he was too impatient.

The woman turned her computer screen around and Jack grumbled at the quality of the footage. But sure enough, there were two men, one older and grey, one younger with dark hair, entering a cab that pulled away from the curb and disappeared into the flow of traffic.

“There must be a million different cab companies here,” Jack hissed, a hand rubbing at his eyes. They had been here, the camera had proved that, or had at least shown two men that looked extremely similar.

“That was Carlos,” the man explained. “He always brings me a coffee if he makes a stop here.”

“I need his number, woman!” Jack ordered sharply, making the woman jump once more before moving into action. She pulled her phone from her pocket and her finger swiped over the screen several times before she grabbed a sticky note and scribbled over it, handing it out to Jack. “Thank you.” Jack snatched the number from her and looked over it before giving her a smile. “Merry Christmas.”

Jack left the apartment building and looked out at the late afternoon sun with a sigh, turning up his collar against the wind and hunching his shoulders against the cold. He could wait a day. It was Christmas after all, and Will was still alive. Hannibal wouldn’t kill him. Not at the moment. Not when it was a game now for who had Will in their corner. Will was too precious for Hannibal to lose. It could wait until tomorrow.

For now, he wanted a beer or maybe a dozen of them to forget his first Christmas without his wife there and then a hot shower to chase away the chill in his bones.

* * *

Will’s eyes opened with a deep inhale, a soreness in his limbs that he didn’t want to lose, the scent of Hannibal all around him, underlaid with something new. Something buttery and spicy.

Will pushed himself from Hannibal’s bed and stretched out his aching muscles before finding his discarded clothes, pulling them back on. He left the room and went to the railing along the catwalk to find Hannibal sat contently on the couch, legs folded under him, sketching, a half-drunk glass of wine beside him on the side table.

The scent was stronger now, something sweet that Will couldn’t exactly place, something baking. The spice in it was strong, fresh as well as something bitter and earthy.

Will went for the stairs and at his footsteps, Hannibal glanced up from his art, a small smile on his lips. “Did you sleep well?”

“Yes,” Will answered, hitting the landing. “What are you making?”

“Gingerbread,” Hannibal answered, turning back to his work. “I hope that doesn’t bother you.”

“It smells delicious,” Will replied with a small nod, coming to the couch and looking over Hannibal’s shoulder at his work. Will stated, heart picking up its pace at the form that was being sketched. His own naked body, asleep in Hannibal’s bed, sheets covering him, but leaving very little to the imagination. “I don’t recall posing for you.”

“No need.” Hannibal stopped his shading of Will’s careful curls and looked up at Will. “I had my fill when you fell asleep.”

“You watched me sleep?”

Hannibal gave a small nod and Will felt a blush come to his cheeks. “*Per daug gražu*.” Hannibal placed his drawing aside and rose to his feet, straightening his suit coat. Before Will could ask, Hannibal supplied the answer. “Far too beautiful for your own good, Will.” He placed a kiss on Will's head and then went for the kitchen to check on the cookies.

Will followed and leaned against the opposite side of the island as Hannibal pulled the tray of cookies from the oven and set them on some hot pads. Hannibal shook out the hand towel and tossed it over his shoulder before closing the oven door.

“Are we going to talk about what happened?” Will questioned, finger tracing the dark line in the marble.

“Do you want to talk about what happened?” Hannibal asked, hands on the counter, facing Will head on, face kind. Will shook his head, eyes dropping back to the marking in the marble. “Very well.” Hannibal moved to a cabinet and fetched out a plate, adding a dark circular cookie to the plate, pushing it towards Will. “They’re hot. Be careful.”

Will looked over the cookie for a moment before reaching out and breaking a piece off of it and putting it to his mouth, the taste and scent of ginger strong and pleasantly overwhelming, a hint of molasses underneath it. His eyes closed as he tried to imprint this to his memory as well, everything that he could find to store away, ball and chain to himself for the future.

“You’re wonderfully domestic, Hannibal,” Will said as he opened his eyes to find Hannibal waiting for his opinion. Hannibal’s chin tilted up in question. “I could get used to this, I think.”

“To this?” Hannibal pushed for clarification, heading around to where Will was breaking off another piece of the cookie and eating it with a nod.

“To being here with you,” Will explained with a shrug. “In this house. Something quiet and simple. No more nightmares or bodies. Just us and your cooking and your drawing and your playing the piano and your reading those stupid books that I will never be able to understand. I could get used to this.” Hannibal tipped his head to the side, still listening. “Stop fishing for compliments,” Will said with a smile, pushing at Hannibal’s chest. “You know you’re too good to be true, I don’t have to tell you everyday, arrogant bastard.”

Will reached out for another piece of his cookie and the moment he placed it into his mouth, Hannibal kissed him, the taste of wine mixing with the ginger in a pleasant way as if Hannibal had picked the wine on purpose just to compliment the cookies. He probably had.

“Have you lost your reflex to resist?” Hannibal teased when he pulled away from Will to move the cookies to a cooling rack.

“Have I ever had that reflex around you?”

“In the beginning, I suspect.”

“There was never hope for me, was there?” Will laughed, letting the feeling of home wash over him. Here and now, he was home. Here and now, he was happy. Here and now he was safe and it was all he had ever wanted, everything he had ever needed. But then Hannibal knew that. He knew everything. Exactly what to say and do in every situation that arose.

“I suppose not,” Hannibal answered, now taking the cookie sheet to the sink to wash it.

“I can do that,” Will offered, stepping around the counter and nudging Hannibal out of the way of the sink. Will rolled up his sleeves and grabbed a rag, wetting it in the sink and pumping soap onto it as Hannibal’s hands snaked around his hips and his chin rested on Will’s shoulder to watch the empath work.

“How are you feeling?” Hannibal asked softly.

“Fine. Why?” Will scrubbed at the cookie sheet, making sure all of the crumbs were gone.

“I just want to make sure.” Hannibal placed a kiss to Will’s temple and he watched as a smile pulled at Will’s scar.

“You’re not going to lose me. I promised, didn’t I?” Hannibal nodded in answer to Will’s question. “Then you won’t lose me.” Will washed the soap from the sheet and reached back, pulling the hand towel from Hannibal’s shoulder with a smirk, using it to dry the pan. “You worry too much.”

“Not enough,” Hannibal argued, releasing Will with a deep breath. “I get too content when I have several days with you. Too hopeful.”

Will frowned. “There’s nothing wrong with being hopeful.”

“There is when it’s been ripped away too many times.”

“This is all you’ve ever wanted for us, isn’t it?” Will asked, turning around to face Hannibal, the emotions on his face far more pronounced than they usually were. Something deep and pained across his skin. “To be together, always. To be there for one another no matter what happens. Good, bad, blood and sugar?”

“Most of it,” Hannibal agreed, fingers flexing at his sides, antsy.

“I’m not going to kill with you,” Will clarified, putting the cookie sheet away. “But if you need to, you can leave. Just don’t tell me where you go or what you do.”

“Need to?” Hannibal echoed curiously. “Need to, no. Want to, yes.”

“Do you miss the taste of flesh that badly?”

Will jumped as hands took his hips and there was a nip at his neck. “Not when I have yours.” Hannibal released him and made his way back to the living room, sitting back down on the couch and taking a sip of his wine.

Chapter End Notes

cher- dear

brangus berniuk-dear boy

Mylimas berniukas-precious

mon cher- my dear

Taigi švelnus- So gentle

Tyla, mano mylimoji-Silence, my beloved.

Tokia graži mano meilė- My love is so beautiful

Pasakyk man, ko tau reikia- Tell me what you need

mielasis-darling

Mano mylimasis- my precious

Atsipalaiduok, mano meile-Relax, my love

Mano brangiausias- my dearest

Pažadu būti švelnus, brangus- I promise to be gentle, dear

Švelnus. Taigi švelnus- Gentle. So gentle.

Per daug gražu- Too beautiful.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

“I feel fine. Why are you asking?”

“Would you draw me a clock if I asked you to?”

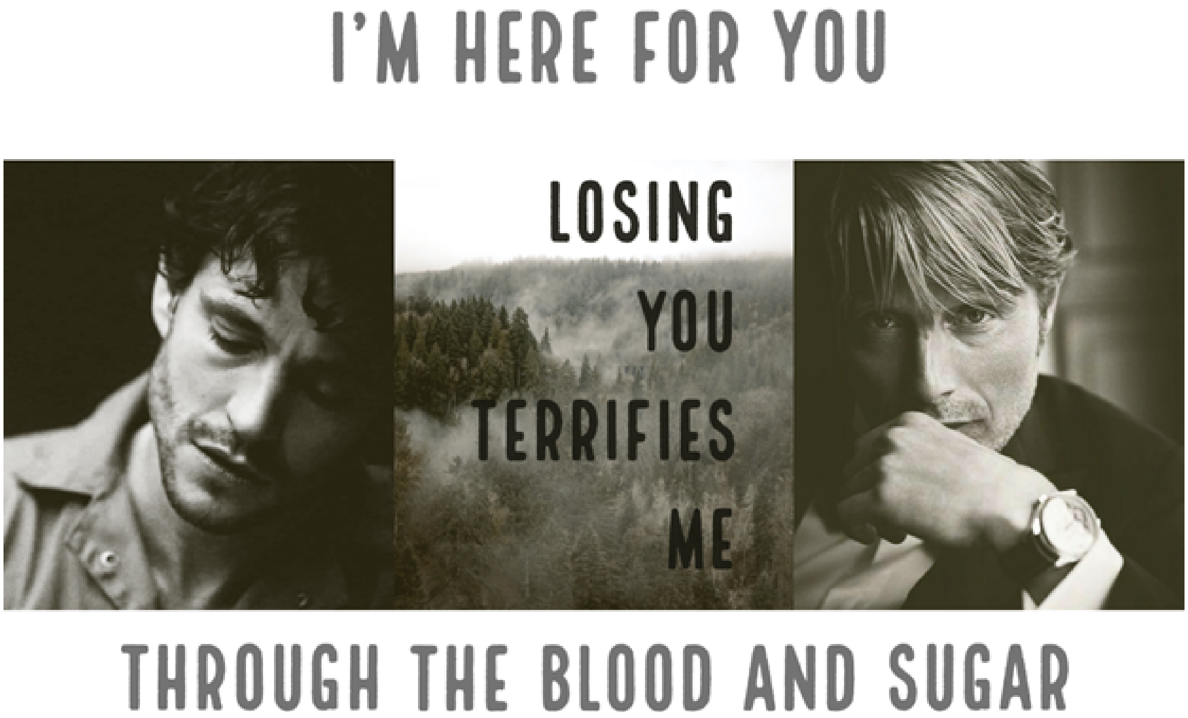
Will frowned. “To humor you?”

“To humor me,” Hannibal agreed with a nod.

Chapter Notes

Thanks again to my sister and my wonderful beta, @PitaGonzalezMe on twitter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes


I'M HERE FOR YOU
LOSING YOU TERRIFIES ME
THROUGH THE BLOOD AND SUGAR

“We’ve been at this for hours,” Carlos grumbled, rubbing at his face tiredly. "I need to get back to work."

"Not until you tell me the truth," Jack repeated, hand slamming into the desk. "We have footage of your car picking up those two men." He jabbed his finger at the pictures of Will and Dr. Lecter that were on the table. "We have an eye witness that says it was you. These men are wanted for multiple counts of murder. Where did you drop them off?"

There was a deep sigh from Carlos who closed his eyes for a moment and Jack waited for the silence to become too much and for Carlos to fill it.

"Ok," Carlos said softly, sitting forward in his chair. "He paid me a shit ton of money not to tell anyone where they went."

"Where did they go?"

"Some cabin up in the woods. A good three or four hours away."

Jack nodded. "The address?"

"I-I don't know it anymore. My system deletes the locations after 24 hours," Carlos answered quickly. "All I know is that it was north."

Jack gave a nod and rose from the table, leaving the interrogation room, slamming the door behind himself as he went. At least he had a direction and his team, though smaller now, was waiting and ready in the hallway for him.

"Zeller-"

"I will start searching for cabins in the north, three or four hours out of the city," Zeller interrupted. "I will get you that report out shortly."

Jack nodded and turned to Price who also immediately knew what his job was. "I will make sure we have a copy of this tape, get an update on the blood analysis and then will join Zeller."

"Thank you," Jack said with yet another nod, dismissing both men and missing Beverly's snarky remarks.

Hannibal watched from the window, sipping on a cup of tea as Will worked on cutting up a log for more firewood.

Hannibal could see the discomfort in Will's shoulder as Will rubbed at it after a particularly hard split with the axe.

Silly boy, Hannibal thought. *You haven't been doing your exercises.*

Hannibal took another sip of tea and placed it aside, sliding his hands into his slack pockets as he watched Will work, keeping his promise of not helping so his knee could heal.

But Hannibal didn't care about his knee. All he cared about was another day with Will. One with Will fully intact, mentally safe and sound.

Maybe Will had been right. Maybe this was the time. Maybe Will would finally be here to stay. Maybe Hannibal owed him an apology.

With a decided nod, Hannibal went to the back door and stepped out onto the deck. "Will," he called across the snow. Will stopped, breath clinging to the cold air, axe now in the snow by his feet. "I'm going to go into town. It's just down the road."

Will gave a confused look, using his teeth to pull at his gloves, making Hannibal's chest stir with a feeling he couldn't quite place.

"Do you want me to come with you?" Will asked, making his way to the deck.

"I'll only be an hour or two. It's not far," Hannibal assured. "I need to stretch out my knee anyway." Hannibal smirked then. "Make sure you're doing your exercises for me. Your shoulder is just as important as my leg."

Will gave a small nod and glanced back at his work for a moment, gloves held tightly in pink bare hands. "Alright. I'll see if I can have something made for lunch for when you get back."

Hannibal gave a small huff of laughter and a nod before going back inside to grab his coat.

The walk to town wasn't bad. Most of the snow on the road had been pushed aside and Hannibal could walk easily.

His knee had been aching terribly since yesterday, having spent far too long on it, honoring his angel, polishing his halo.

But moderated use would be good for him. The only way to strengthen the muscles back up would be to work them.

Hannibal reached the first few buildings on the main Street and he looked at each of them carefully until he found the building he was looking for.

He opened the shop door and found a young teen girl at the front desk, filling out some paperwork.

She glanced up and put a smile on her face. "Morning," she said cheerfully, blonde hair bouncing.

"Morning," Hannibal greeted with a nod, pulling his gloves from his hands and shoving them in his pocket.

"What can I do for you?"

The cookbook was covered in flour, as were the counters, the floor and Will. The stand mixer whirred to a stop as Will snatched at the cord. With a sigh, he brushed himself off, then went to get the broom and dustpan. He pushed the mess from the counter onto the floor and then began to sweep up the mess he had made, chuckling.

Hannibal would have given him such a disappointed look, Will could see it now. One with a raised eyebrow before Hannibal’s OCD kicked in and he began to help Will clean so that everything was particularly sterile. Probably a habit from his days in surgery. Will dumped the flour into the trash and put the broom away, before looking over what was supposed to be lunch.

The front door opened and Will moved from the kitchen, expecting to see Hannibal finally return and instead found a black and white Border Collie trot through the door, pink tongue out and collar jingling.

Will gave a confused look, but lowered himself to the floor, a single hand reaching out. He clicked his tongue, calling the dog's attention to him and the Border Collie slowly moved closer, smelling at Will's outstretched hand.

"It's alright," he said softly, the dog's cold nose pressing into his fingers. "There we go." He scratched at the dog's head, not noticing the front door closing and a man pulling his coat from his shoulders to add it to the coat rack. Will's fingers took the collar and twisted the tag until he could read it. "Izzy, huh?"

"The shelter thinks she's about a year old," Hannibal announced, the lash going onto the coat rack as well and several bags of shopping being placed on the dining table.

Will looked up with a confused smile. "The shelter?" Izzy nipped at his hand and Will returned his focus to the dog, scratching her behind the ears. His smile dropped as realization came to him. He stood up and stepped a bit closer to Hannibal, who stood patiently with his hands crossed in front of him. "Is she for me?" Hannibal gave a single nod as Izzy weaved her way through Will's legs, knocking him a bit off balance. "You didn't have to do that."

"I am well aware that I didn't have to, silly boy." Hannibal stepped closer with a half smile. Izzy's nose pushed into the back of Will's knee and Will gave a stern *Ssk* through his teeth, though Izzy didn't listen. Not like his dogs back home. "She will have to be trained of course. She does know some basic commands, though."

Will glanced down at Izzy who was happily pushing herself back into Will's legs, nose trying to nuzzle at Will's hand for more scratches. "Sit," he commanded, voice firm. Izzy tipped her head to the side, but did as told, tail wagging. His attention returned to Hannibal who had stepped even closer. "Why?"

"Why what, dear boy?"

"Why for me?"

"I thought she would make you happy. She does, doesn't she?"

"Yes," Will answered softly.

Hannibal reached out a hand to Will's face and gave a small chuckle as he wiped a white powder from Will's cheek. "What kind of messes did you make while I was gone?" Hannibal pulled playfully at one of Will's curls and more of the powder puffed out.

Will rolled his eyes, hands going to shake out his hair, dust filling the air. "I was trying to make pasta but failed to realize that you can't just put flour into the mixer."

Hannibal gave a bright laugh at the words, the same laugh that Will had heard the first day they had arrived at this cabin. "It's best to start at a low speed until the ingredients are all incorporated."

"Yeah, I know that now." Will snorted. "I should leave the cooking to you."

"Nonsense," Hannibal insisted, pulling off his suit coat and placing it on a chair before unbuttoning and rolling up his sleeves. "We just need to train you is all."

"I'm not a dog," Will pointed out, a smile still on his face.

“Pasta is fairly easy. Let me teach you.” Hannibal offered, looking over the items that were on the counter and the mess that was in the stand mixer, each in a light dusting of flour.

“Stay,” Will ordered, pointing at Izzy before moving back into the kitchen with Hannibal. Will glanced back at movement to find Izzy following after him. “Ssk,” he said, calling the dog’s attention to him. He pointed back to where Izzy had previously been. “Stay.” Izzy backed up a few steps and Will smiled. “Sit.”

* * *

“The blood on the china is a match for Will Graham,” Price announced as the computer program beeped happily at a job well done. “It was his, one hundred percent.”

“We’re on the right track,” Jack said with a breath of relief. “I can’t sleep until we get them back.”

“Jack, I’ve been searching for days,” Zeller grumbled, scrolling through lists of properties and cabins. “There are hundreds of cabins north of New York City in a four hour radius. I have no idea what we’re looking for.” He rubbed at his tired eyes. “I’ve been searching for anything recently sold, but I’m not sure how else to narrow it down.”

Jack stepped over to the computer screen to look over the real estate website that Zeller had up. “What do we know about both of them?” Jack asked, prompting his team to think a bit harder. “It's our job to profile, so profile them.”

“Will is secluded,” Zeller said with a shrug. “Doesn’t like to be around people.”

“He enjoys the outdoors,” Price threw out, leaving his own computer and moving to be over by Jack and Zeller. “He likes to fish.”

“It’s the middle of winter,” Zeller pointed out harshly.

“Excuse me,” Price grumbled.

“Enough,” Jack ordered. “He’s taken me ice fishing before.”

“Ok, so something near a river or a lake.” Zeller began typing into his computer again, pulling up more websites to scroll through.

“And what about Dr. Lecter?” Jack pushed.

“He would want to be comfortable,” Price answered with a shrug. “His prison cell was nicer than my apartment.”

Zeller laughed. “A dumpster is better than your apartment.”

“I said enough!” Jack hissed through his teeth before Price had a chance to snap back. “Dr. Lecter would want to be comfortable. He wouldn’t live in something small or unfurnished. He likes to spend money and be around people.”

“So a secluded cabin with enough land to have a body of water and be near a town for easy access to necessities.” Zeller began typing again, tipping his head to the side. “Something high end, with a nice kitchen.”

"A basement," Price threw out with a shrug. "You remember what we found in the last one." He shuddered at the thought.

"Something off the market. It wouldn't be listed on any websites, not even as recently sold." Zeller stopped at Jack's words and glanced over his shoulder with a confused look. "He would have had it already purchased, already making payments, already have a life established there even if it were empty. He did the same thing in the apartment building. He had rent paid in advance. Somewhere to jump to if they were spooked."

"That's going to make them more difficult to find," Price pointed out and Zeller shot him a dark look.

"Then you should be helping too," Jack said, causing Zeller to smirk.

* * *

Hannibal wasn't sure where the jealousy had come from. That was a lie he kept telling himself. He knew exactly where the jealousy came from. The fact that Will's attention was no longer completely and utterly on him.

Hannibal knew it was illogical to be upset over a dog. Especially when he had gotten the thing for Will so Will would have something to do other than be bored around the house, because Will was bored. He would never admit it to Hannibal, but Hannibal knew. There was only so long that he could read Dante or show Will how to cook or play the piano for him.

But that smile on that boy's lips. He would put up with a dog if it got Will to smile like that forever. It was radiant, the sun while they were trapped inside while it snowed. It was distracting and Hannibal found it hard to focus on anything else but that smile.

Will collapsed on the couch with a huff of laughter, shaking the book that was in Hannibal's hand. Hannibal glanced over with a frown as Izzy jumped up onto the couch. "Hey," Will said firmly, pointing at the floor. "Down." With a small whine, Izzy hopped off the couch and Will gave Hannibal an apologetic look. "Sorry. She's learning."

"I didn't say anything," Hannibal said, turning the page of his book and continuing in the story, though he wasn't paying it much attention.

"You've become much more expressive since we've come here." Will shifted so that he was facing Hannibal now. Hannibal closed his book and looked over with an intrigued look. "Like that," Will teased with a smile, causing Hannibal's face to go blank nearly instantly. Will laughed lightly. "I can read you easily now, Dr. Lecter. You might want to be careful."

"Then read me, Will," Hannibal instructed, the book now placed aside and full attention on Will.

"I know you're jealous," Will stated strongly. He watched Hannibal's face carefully and smirked at the way Hannibal kept himself emotionless now that he knew Will was watching. "I can tell. The way you ignore Izzy. The way that you brush off going on walks. The way you go to bed early barely saying good night unless I prompt you to."

Hannibal's fingers tapped on his knee for a moment as he considered the words. Will was right of course, but Hannibal stayed silent. Will took his hands and Hannibal released a breath that had been trapped in his chest for days.

“I’m still yours, Hannibal,” Will assured him. “You are so human sometimes, God.” Will moved closer and placed a kiss to Hannibal’s cheek. “Why do you constantly have to be reassured?”

“I’ve never had something like you before,” Hannibal answered quietly. “And I’m scared.”

“Scared?” Will scoffed. “Scared doesn't become you, Hannibal. Stop trying to distance yourself from me.” Hannibal’s eyes avoided Will’s gaze and Will gave a small nod in understanding. “That’s what it is, isn’t it?” Hannibal pulled his hands free of Will’s hand, one of them covered his mouth, hiding his expression from Will. “You’re trying to pull away so that if I forget again you don’t hurt.”

“I do not want to discuss this,” Hannibal muttered, getting to his feet and going for the selections of wine over in the wine rack. Will watched from the couch for a moment before getting to his feet and following Hannibal to where he was pulling out bottles and putting them back, unable to decide on which one he wanted, instructing Izzy to stay in her bed.

“We are discussing this,” Will said firmly. “Hannibal, this is-”

“Will, I appreciate the concern, but-”

“This is not something that we are going to push under the rug. Not this time,” Will said, voice strong and louder than Hannibal’s, cutting the doctor off. “I always play by your rules and your games, but not this time. We are going to work through this together.”

Hannibal snorted. “*Lengva pasakyti, bet ne padaryti*.”

“No,” Will shook his head, folding his arms over his chest. “You are not hiding behind that this time. You are not going to talk at me. You’re going to talk with me.”

“You sound like a psychiatrist, Dr. Graham.”

Will frowned, eyes sharp on Hannibal as the man turned to face the empath. “No, I’m not. I am trying to be a good partner and the whole way we are going to make this work is if we talk. You can’t hide things from me anymore Hannibal. I can let you keep your secrets and let you have time to yourself, but if it concerns me, then you have to let me in.”

Hannibal’s face was turned down in a frown and he shook his head. “*Jūs žiūrite per rožinius akinius.”*

“Hannibal!” Will’s voice was stern, loud, making Hannibal still. He had never heard Will raise his voice in that way before. Calm, gentle Will making way for whatever creature was there now. Will sighed, a hand scratching at his stubble. “I’m still here. With you.” His voice was gentler now, but just as serious. “I haven’t forgotten you and I am not going to.”

“That doesn’t change the past.”

“Then tell me!” Will’s hands were thrown down to his sides in exasperation. “The only way you are going to work through this is if we talk about it. If you need to think of me as a psychiatrist so that we can work this out, then I will be your psychiatrist, but we are going to work on this. This is not something that I am going to drop and forget. You can’t do this alone Hannibal. Not anymore. And I won’t let you.”

Hannibal gave a deep exhale and shaky fingers pushed silver from his eyes. He shook his head and Will watched as the man crumbled. Hannibal. Strong and dangerous Hannibal, sinking to the floor. Killer and fugitive Hannibal using the back of his hand to stifle his tears. A man who had taken more lives than Will probably knew of, reduced to crying on the floor next to a wine rack.

Will blinked several times, unsure exactly what to make of the scene. Did he help? Did he leave the man alone? Did he speak? Did he stay silent? Was he too harsh and demanding?

No. Hannibal felt safe here. Hannibal would never have broken down in front of anyone else. Will doubted that Hannibal even wanted to snap in front of Will, but here he was. No one could stay strong forever. Not even transcendent Hannibal.

Will sighed and lowered himself to the floor, leaning up against the wall, arms on his knees, close enough to feel Hannibal's warmth next to him, but not close enough to disturb Hannibal if the man didn't want anything to do with Will at the moment.

Will rested his head against the wall and waited in the silence that was broken up by small noises from Hannibal. After a moment or two more, Will couldn't take it, pain swirling in his chest.

"Hannibal, I'm sorry," he got out. "I wasn't trying to push you. I didn't understand how badly all of this hurt you. But I would like to understand if you will let me in. I don't want you to be alone in this."

"I don't think I could go through a relapse again," Hannibal said, voice steady despite the tears that had made his eyes go red. "And I am too afraid to let myself enjoy this incase it comes crashing down."

"It won't."

"Who are you trying to convince?' Hannibal asked softly, wiping at his cheeks, his fit finished. Will didn't need to see that part of him. No one needed to see that part of him. He just needed to make sure he kept better control over himself, which seemed to be proving rather difficult the longer he spent time with Will.

Do you believe you could change me, the way I've changed you?

I already did.

The old conversation played through Hannibal's head on repeat as it had for the last several days. Will had changed him so deeply he sometimes had trouble remembering who he was before Will. Everything was Will and it was probably the most unhealthy relationship he had ever been in, but Hannibal didn't want anything else. Codependency was one of the first among a multitude of issues between the two of them, but Hannibal didn't care and was more than certain that Will felt the same.

I already did.

"I'm sorry to be so bothersome," Hannibal muttered after a moment of silence that Will was not filling.

Will gave a small smile. "Never apologize for coming to me."

Hannibal gave a nod, remembering a somehow simpler time where they drank coffee in his kitchen on an early morning. A pleasant interruption to his day. Will was such a pleasant interruption.

“Hannibal, we will get through this,” Will assured, glancing over at Hannibal who looked so out of place sitting on the floor. “I don’t want you to think you’re saving us by pushing me away. I’m here, through the blood and the sugar.”

“The blood and the sugar,” Hannibal repeated softly. “I’ll be more present.”

“Give me your everything.”

“Always.”

* * *

Will woke to an empty bed, the space beside him that was normally filled by Hannibal was cold. Will blinked around the stillness and inhaled deeply at the smell of something cooking. There was always something cooking. There was always something that smelled wonderfully perfect and Will gave a faint smile through the sleepiness.

He could get used to this. Lord, he could get used to this.

Will got from the bed and stretched his arms over his head before heading to the bathroom to start a shower. He turned it up as hot as he could stand it and undressed as the steam fogged up the mirrors.

The water was hot as it cascaded down his back and straightened his curls into his face. Will glanced down at his hands that were pruned before he was aware of how long he had just been standing there. The small nick on his finger from the plate that Hannibal had dropped was nearly healed and he had made sure that Hannibal hadn’t made a big deal about it by not telling him.

Will sighed and reached for the shampoo, washing out his hair before finding the soap that Hannibal used. Will quickly rubbed the bar between his hands until there were suds and scrubbed himself down, fingers going for his neck.

There was a caustic and burning pain in Will’s head and he groaned, eyes snapping shut as he collapsed against the side of the shower for balance. The water was no longer warm and pleasant, instead daggers against his skin and he reached out with a hand in a violent tremor trying to find the faucet handle while his other hand clutched to his head in hopes that he could hold himself together.

The clawfoot tub was a brilliant white looking like it had just been scrubbed clean with bleach. Steam rose into the air, the room silent in its relaxed state. A man with silvering hair lay in the tub. As Will stepped closer he found the pristine tub was filled with a deep crimson liquid, something that shouldn’t be bathed in.

And there was Hannibal. Eyes closed, hands gripping the sides of the tub, a glass of wine near him on a chair that he had moved to the tub.

The water finally shut off and Will sunk to the bottom of the shower, clutching his head, lips bit tightly between his teeth so that he wouldn't let out the scream that was in his throat.

Will wasn't sure where he was, but a lighthouse was not something he thought he would find at the bottom of a cliff in the Atlantic and he was sure that whether this was a dream or hell, but he was going to finish what he started. Hannibal couldn't be in this world. Not anymore. Not after what they had both done together. And he didn't belong here either. He would take care of that.

With silent footsteps, Will stepped up to the tub, going to one side, hands finding Hannibal's throat as if it were second nature. Maroon eyes jumped awake, but Will shoved them under the blood that filled the tub.

Will stumbled from the shower, reaching for the towel on the hook on the wall. His feet slipped out from under him and he tumbled to the floor, towel coming with him.

Fingernails clawed at Will's wrists, drawing blood to mix with the tub. Feet kicked and the blood splashed across the tiles, wetting Will's bare feet.

Will would remove them both. No more pain or suffering and absolutely no more blood . No more crimson spilt. No more life drained away in sticky copper scents. No more fucking blood.

A wine glass shattered against Will's face and Will slipped in his attempt to step out of the way. Hannibal rose to the surface sputtering and coughing, water leaving his mouth.

Will blinked. Water. He was sitting in a puddle of it that was slowly being stained with the red wine that had been thrown at him. His fingers touched the small nick in his cheek. It wouldn't be enough to leave a scar, but it was enough to wake him up.

With wide eyes, Will scrambled away from the tub, spreading the water further across the bathroom floor. Hannibal climbed from the tub, grabbing a nearby towel and wrapping it around his waist, coughing so hard he began dry heaving. His hand took the side of the tub until he finally emptied his stomach into the tub and Will could only watch.

Hannibal's legs shook and he dropped to the bathroom floor, looking over at Will with watering eyes and flushed skin. "Are you alright?" he rasped out, throat raw. Will gave a shocked look, pushing himself even further away from Hannibal who was abnormally calm for having nearly been killed. "We need to get that cut taken care of so it doesn't get infected and make sure you don't have any glass in it."

"I-I just," Will stuttered. "But I just-"

"Doctor's orders."

Will's eyes snapped open as his thumb pressed into his wrist where Hannibal had taught him to press. He gasped, air cooling his burning lungs. A memory. It had to have been. Will wasn't sure what else to make of it and Hannibal had said that he had been attacked by Will multiple times. It fit, but it made Will's stomach churn uneasily.

“Will?” a voice called through the door with a small knock. “Is everything alright?’ It was Hannibal.

“Just slipped in the shower,” Will replied, voice scratchy. “I'm ok.”

“Alright. Breakfast is ready when you come downstairs.”

“I'll be down in a moment.”

Will could hear Hannibal's footsteps retreat and he pushed himself onto his knees, pressure point still clasped tightly, afraid of what his mind would do once he let it go.

He awkwardly got dressed, applying pressure to his wrist every moment he could and then made his way downstairs hoping that Hannibal wouldn't ask, would let what happened slide because somehow Will felt like Hannibal would immediately know what was wrong. He always knew.

Will hit the landing and Izzy immediately jumped up, racing to Will. Will petted her head awkwardly and instructed her to go back to her bed and chew toy.

Hannibal's eyebrows were furrowed as he caught Will's eyes. "You alright?"

"Just a migraine," Will replied softly, wandering over to the table where his place was set. On the china plate a half of an orange that had been hollowed and something that looked like chocolate pudding was in the middle, topped with whipped cream. Only his place was set though.

"I have already eaten," Hannibal explained as Will looked over his shoulder. "You were sleeping. I didn't want to wake you. I took care of Izzy. Just sit and eat."

"What is it?" Will asked as he obeyed, sitting at his place setting and using a spoon to scoop up the chocolate dish. He placed it in his mouth and sighed.

Hannibal smiled. "*Sanguinaccio Dolce*," he answered, sitting beside Will, taking his wrist and leaning his thumb into the pressure point that quickly lightened the pain that was clouding Will's vision. "Sweet black pudding."

Will stopped and lowered the spoon with a crinkled nose. If his small trip to England to try to be adventurous had taught him anything, he knew full and well what was in this pudding.

"Where were you this morning?" he asked, spoon lowering to the plate as his stomach twisted, fighting with his mind and tongue in the taste verses the knowledge of what he had just put in his mouth.

"Would you like the honest answer or-"

"I don't want to know," Will clarified quickly, taking another bite of the food in front of him, pushing from his mind what it was. "It's wonderful, as always."

“Your forehead is bruised. Are you ok?” Hannibal reached out to Will and Will flinched out of his reach, his own hand going to his forehead and finding a bump that was beginning to form.

“It must have happened when I slipped,” Will muttered.

“I’ll get you some ice.” Hannibal rose from his chair and Will waited until Hannibal was well in the kitchen before he let his hands go to his head to try to keep it from splitting in half, the ball of a mace rolling around, knocking into the sides of his skull, battering him as if it wanted to get out. “Will.”

Will glanced up and took the ice pack from Hannibal’s outstretched hand, placing it to his forehead. He gasped at the cold and squeezed his eyes shut tightly. The sound of Hannibal’s chair was deafening and Will winced as the wave assaulted him. Hannibal pulled Will’s hand from his head, quickly finding the pressure point again and Will gasped at the relief, laying his head down on the table, ice pack still firmly to the bruise.

“Thank you,” he said, breathing hard, letting Hannibal’s other hand gently trace lines up and down his forearm. “This one is worse than last time.”

“What did you remember?”

Will blinked at the bluntness of the question but couldn’t bring himself to lift his head up from the table. “Of course you would know,” Will whispered, his breath fogging up the wood of the tabletop.

“They’ve been worse when you remember things,” Hannibal explained simply, taking Will’s spoon and eating some of what Will had discarded. “We do not have to discuss it. I know that you prefer not to.”

Will gave a small nod. Hannibal seemed better today than he had been yesterday. More himself than the sniffling man by the wine rack. And maybe last night had been something that the man needed. Something to help him get back into his mind space. Will didn’t have to be told to know exactly where Hannibal had been the night before. Will only hoped that whatever Hannibal had done had been done far away from their home. He didn’t want to leave here yet, or ever for that matter.

“Did I...” Will trailed off, licking his lips, watching as his breath continued to fog the table before it disappeared. “Did I attack you in the bathroom?”

“Are you referring to the time with the bathtub or the time with the-”

“Bathtub,” Will interrupted, really not wanting to hear about what else he had done to Hannibal.

“Yes. As I recall, you nearly drowned me.” Hannibal wore a small smirk at the memory that played through his mind, something akin to pride in his veins. The monster he had unleashed in Will. “I think it was one of your better attempts.”

“Don’t make this a joke, Hannibal,” Will grumbled as he thought over the event that was pounding through his skull. He shivered at how calm Hannibal had been. “I don’t like hurting you.”

Jack stared at the body, head tipped to the side. The mall had been closed for them to work and Jack couldn’t find it in himself to move further into the room. The holiday displays were untouched, Christmas decorations still up. Trees wrapped in tinsel were undisturbed and the Christmas lights gave odd colored hues to the body of a teen girl.

The blonde had been used to replace a mannequin, arms and legs in unnatural poses like the two she was placed next to. Blank stares. Waxy, thin, synthetically human.

“She is between 16-18,” Zeller explained, looking over the girl for a moment. “Employees of the store said that yesterday she was yelling at a clerk because they wouldn’t take back the shoes she had purchased after their 30 days return policy.”

“Due to the coloration of the skin, we think she was drained of blood,” Price continued. “There are also two holes, one in the bottom of each heel, that would help with draining blood. You can access the main arteries in your leg that way.”

“Any other injuries?” Jack questioned, shoving his hands into his pockets wishing more than anything he had Will’s eyes on his side. Someone to see through the mess and put chaos into order.

“She was most likely suffocated. There’s bruising around her neck,” Zeller answered, tipping his head to the side. “We couldn’t get any prints off her though. The killer wore gloves.”

“There are also markings that a possible organ removal was performed, but we won’t know until we get her into autopsy. She’s too mutilated under the dress to outright tell.” Price shrugged with a tipping of his head. “It was him, Jack. I’m not sure who else it would be.”

“Is there any security footage?” Jack questioned, pulling his eyes away from the girl and lowering them to where Price and Zeller were working and taking pictures of different things around them.

“The cameras were out of order,” was Jack’s answer.

Jack groaned frustratedly. “Of course they were.”

“What are we doing with the cabin lead now?” Price asked curiously. “He was here last night. She’s only been dead for a few hours. Are they still in the city?”

“They would have to be, wouldn’t they? How else would he have done this?” Zeller agreed.

“He could have come back last night and returned to the cabin,” Jack suggested, turning away from the scene. “We keep searching for the cabin. He wanted us to find the body in the city, anything to pull us off their trail.”

“And what about Will?” Zeller asked, getting to his feet from where he was taking pictures of the holes in the girl’s feet. “Do you think he was involved?”

“If he knows what’s good for him, he won’t be,” Jack grumbled with a sigh. “Get her back to autopsy so that we can figure out what she is missing. It’s time to add another count to the Chesapeake Ripper.”

“It’s New Year’s tonight,” Will announced into the evening, wrestling a stick from Izzy’s mouth to toss it across the room once more.

Hannibal glanced up to where Will was, that beautiful smile on his lips. Hannibal placed the pen in his hand into the notebook and closed it. “So it is,” he breathed out.

“What have you been writing?” Will questioned, absently pushing Izzy away as she tried to jump on Will. “It’s been ten days. I still remember, Hannibal.”

“Yes, you do beautiful boy,” Hannibal said with a nod, fingers tapping the leather of the notebook. “I’ve just been making notes about the memories you have recovered. How are you feeling tonight?”

“Enough,” Will instructed the dog softly. “Go lay down.” Izzy obeyed, circling her dog bed two or three times before finally settling into it. Will patted himself down to try to get the hair off him and got to his feet. “I feel fine. Why are you asking?”

“Would you draw me a clock if I asked you to?”

Will frowned. “To humor you?”

“To humor me,” Hannibal agreed with a nod.

Will was quiet for a moment and slowly stepped over to the couch, reaching his hand out. Hannibal flipped his notebook open to an empty page and passed it over to Will who began to scribble in it. “My name is Will Graham,” Will stated just as he had multiple times in Hannibal’s office. He glanced at the watch on his wrist before continuing. “It is 11:48 on New Year's Eve and I am in my home with my family.”

Will closed the notebook and passed it back to Hannibal who was quiet with a raised eyebrow at what Will had said. Hannibal chose not to press the matter as he opened the notebook to the page that Will had drawn the clock on.

He looked over the sketch for a moment, confirming what he had suspected. Though the clock was not what it had been so many years ago, it was not a perfect clock. The numbers were on the face, but they were scattered and disproportionate.

Hannibal closed the notebook and set it aside, looking over Will who was waiting for an answer as to how he had done with the test. Hannibal gave a half smile that Will didn’t fully believe, but he didn’t pick at it. He didn’t want to ruin the nice, quiet evening.

“Will, can I ask you something?” Hannibal questioned, rising to his feet, pulling off his suit coat, tossing it aside and then loosening his tie. Will gave a shrug and shoved his hands into his pockets. “How many times have you fed Izzy today?”

Will licked at his lips, unsure of what Hannibal was trying to get at. “Twice. Why?” Will replied, watching as the vest joined the jacket and tie. Hannibal undid the top two buttons of his dress shirt and then folded the sleeves up until they were clinging to his muscles. “Hannibal?” Will asked as the silence drove on.

“Would you like a drink?” Hannibal didn’t wait for an answer, simply went for the wine rack.

“Hannibal,” Will said more sternly. “I expect an answer.”

“No reason Will,” Hannibal replied to Will’s earlier inquiry. He looked over the bottles and picked one, holding it out to read the label. “Indulge me once more, if you would.” Hannibal nodded at the bottle in approval and reached for two glasses by the stems. He placed them onto the dining table and went about opening the bottle, twisting the bottle opener into the cork. “How many times did you shower today?”

“Once this morning,” Will grumbled out, folding his arms over his chest. “Why?”

“You have fed Izzy five times today and have showered three.” Hannibal placed the cork to his nose, smelling in the wine before he poured out a careful serving of the wine into the glasses before placing the bottle onto the table. He picked up both of the glasses and took one over to Will who hesitantly took the liquid. His eyes narrowed and watched Hannibal take a sip before he followed, fearing that something had been done to his drink despite the fact that he had watched Hannibal pour it. “You have also taken Izzy on multiple walks and chopped wood multiple times despite the fact that we haven’t had a fire today.”

Will found himself at a loss for words, swallowing hard on some of the wine and coughing as the alcohol burned his nose. Will placed the drink aside, hand over his mouth as he continued to cough, a smoky burn now in his throat.

Hannibal tipped his head to the side in concern and reached out, but Will held up his hand to stop Hannibal, breathing hard through the coughs. “I’m ok,” he assured, trying to catch his breath. “So, it’s happening again, isn’t it?”

“It’s possible,” Hannibal answered with a nod, the concern flushed away and his clinical expression back in place, keeping the man strong. “But you have pulled from days like this just fine as of late. I hope that tonight will be just the same.”

“I thought you didn’t do hope,” Will pointed out.

“You will always be my first, Will.” Hannibal lifted his glass in a toast and finished off the drink, leaving it behind on the table and heading to the large glass window. Will stared after the man, unsure of what to make of him just leaving a mess behind.

Will made his way to the window as well, glancing at his watch. 11:59.

My name is Will Graham. It is 11:59 on New Year’s Eve and I am home with my family, Will thought, trying to pound it into his mind. Everything else had kept so far. This had to stick. Had to stay. Had to be over.

Will watched as the darkness outside of the window was illuminated with fireworks and with a final look at his watch he found it was 12 AM, January 1st. But he was still at home with his family. Still here. Still in place. Still in his mind.

“Happy New Years, Hannibal,” Will whispered, enjoying the dancing lights and dull thuds outside of the window.

A strong hand snatched up Will’s chin and turned his face until there were lips against his. Will smiled against the kiss, arms wrapping around Hannibal’s neck and pulling the man closer. Hannibal broke the kiss and pulled out of Will’s grasp, much to Will’s confusion.

“*Aš tave myliu, protingas berniukas*,” Hannibal whispered with a sad smile. “I’m going to wash up. Enjoy the fireworks.” Hannibal went to the living room and led Izzy to her kennel for the night and then fetched the two glasses of wine, going to the kitchen to wash them.

Will turned his attention back to the window, watching the lights appear and disappear into the night. The muffled sounds of their crackling gave Will the off feeling of being able to hear waves crashing upon a coat line, the assaulting smell of saltwater, burning throats and lungs.

A pain somewhere deep in the back of his head, something throbbing and sharp, making him dizzy. A lighthouse who worked hard on stormy nights, the swirls along the building seeming the climb into the sky as drugs pulled him back under.

Fingers clawed at stitching that itched on his chest, pulling so hard blood dripped down his chest and caked under his fingernails.

Confusion, anger, this driving need to end. End everything. They were unnatural, sick, twisted. They were predators and needed to be stopped. Over and over again, he tried to stop them and over and over again he failed.

Fire, drowning, knives, guns, stairs. Anything he could use. Anything he could get his hands on to make it stop. He wanted it to all go away. He would make it all go away.

And away it went. Blackness caressed by pain was all that was left.

Eyes focused through the pounding in Will's head and his heart dropped as he looked around, unable to place where he was. This wasn't right. This wasn't the Atlantic. This wasn't the Atlantic. This wasn't the Atlantic.

"Will," Hannibal called from the kitchen where he was drying the last glass, but there was no answer. Hannibal might have missed the movement if he didn't look up, Will's footsteps nowhere to be heard.

Hannibal stepped back as the cork screw was brought down from over Will's head. The glass fell from Hannibal's hand and shattered on the floor causing Izzy to bark loudly. Will swiped at him again and Hannibal caught Will's elbow with his palm.

Ten days. A new record. Hannibal laughed at the thought. At the idea that he had been hoping Will would stay with him, that he was finally out of the woods. But Will never stayed. He was whisked away again and again and this was no different. A good moment ripped away from Hannibal, like they were all ripped away from him. Just as he deserved.

Hannibal hooked his foot with the back of Will's ankle and pulled, sending Will crashing to the floor. Hannibal stepped on Will's wrist, using the leverage to wrench the corkscrew form his hand. Hannibal tossed it aside and pulled Will to his feet by the collar of his shirt.

He always did his best not to hurt Will when Will relapsed, but the determination that was in Will's face made Hannibal decide it was better to err on the side of caution. He let his fist collide with Will's face and Will trembled back to the floor. Hannibal glanced around and grabbed for a baking sheet that had been used to cook dinner that was drying on the counter.

There was a punch to his side and Hannibal crumbled into it, Will's other hand snatching up the back of his collar to straighten him up. There was a loud clank as Will's first hit the baking sheet Hannibal threw in front of himself. Will stepped back with a hiss, cradling his fist to his chest and Hannibal swung the baking sheet at Will's face.

Will tumbled back onto the floor and didn't move. The baking sheet hit the floor with a crash and Hannibal dropped to his knees, breathing hard, a hand pressed into where Will had punched him.

Hannibal crawled over to Will, fingers reaching out to check Will's pulse. Finding it still strong, Hannibal took Will's face in his hands. Will moaned, but didn't move. He would be alright. Maybe some bruising, but he would live with minimal damage.

Hannibal sat there for a moment longer, the dog's angry barks somewhere very distant to him now. There was a roaring in his ears just like the wind rushing passed him as they fell even further down for eternity, not at all welcomed by the ocean.

This was it. Hannibal had promised himself and he couldn't break it. Not this time. This wasn't right. None of it was. And he was absolutely the very last thing that Will needed in his life. There was nothing more Hannibal could do to help him.

Hannibal got to his feet and went to his bag on the coat rack, digging through it until he found a syringe and a bottle of unmarked, clear liquid. He placed them on the side table next to the couch and went back over to Will, pulling his dead weight from the floor and over to the couch.

Hannibal filled the syringe and pressed it into Will's neck, pushing the drugs through Will's veins just as he had so many times before. A sedative to calm, something to keep him safe from himself and his mind. Enough to keep him out until Hannibal could leave and someone could find him.

Hannibal went to the stairs and pushed into his room, opening his closet. He reached into the back and pulled out a backpack that was already full of everything he needed to get a few days away. If his knee could hold up, then he could make it. He would be long gone before anyone could find him.

He opened the front pocket on the bag and pulled his phone from it, throwing the bag over his shoulder, turning the phone on as we made his way back down the stairs. While it was starting up, Hannibal gathered several things from around the living room and placed them on the couch beside Will. His notebook with all of his analysis of Will, The Divine Comedy and the small box of fishing lures.

"You boys should have been home hours ago," Jack muttered as he entered their makeshift lab, now located in New York rather than Virginia until they caught their break. "Didn't your flight leave at 8?"

"6," Price responded as he scribbled down on a clipboard something about the girl that was laid out on the table.

"We couldn't leave Jack," Zeller agreed from where he was working on the computer, no doubt still trying to narrow down the search for cabins, but 80 was still far too much. They couldn't go door to door. They just didn't have the manpower.

"It's a holiday," Jack pressed.

"It's always a holiday, Jack," Price argued, lowering the clipboard. "He took her kidneys and liver. The rest looks like it's tact, but he wasn't nice to her. She has GHB in her system. She would have been alive and aware through all of it."

There was an alarm that went off before Jack could ask another question and he turned to Zeller's computer. "His phone pinged," Zeller said excitedly.

"Are you sure?" Price questioned, clipboard forgotten and attention on the computer. "His phone has been off for months."

“I set an alert so that if his phone ever pinged, we would know.” Zeller was busy typing on the keyboard. “Somewhere in Lewis County.”

There was a ringing from Jack’s pocket and Jack flushed out his phone, staring at the name on the screen. Dr. Hannibal Lecter. Jack’s mouth went dry and he licked at his lips before answering the call and placing the phone to his ear.

“Dr. Lecter,” he greeted with a small smile. Price smacked Zeller in the arm and the surprised man began pulling up programs on his computer, trying to trace the number.

“Agent Crawford,” Hannibal answered, accent thick in Jack’s ear. “Happy New Year.”

“Happy New Year to you as well,” Jack turned away from the two scrambling men so he could focus on the call. “To what do I owe the pleasure?”

“I am afraid I am no longer in a position to provide medical care for Will.” There was some shuffling in the background, but Jack couldn’t exactly place it. “He needs help, Jack.”

“Something that you can’t fix? That seems very unlike you, Doctor,” Jack taunted, glancing over his shoulder at the small fight that had broken out between Price and Zeller.

“I did give my best efforts,” Hannibal assured. A dog barked in the background and Jack gave a curious look. “I’ve given him a sedative. It should keep him under until you collect him.”

“You’re leaving him?”

“He has no need for me.”

It was an odd sentiment, but Jack let it slide.

“And where might we find him?” Jack asked, turning back to his team and smacking at Price for the clipboard and pen. Price handed them over and Jack held the phone between his ear and shoulder, ready to write.

“Mountain Laurel Cabin at The King's Pines,” Hannibal answered. “Just off the Independence River.”

“We’ve got it,” Zeller called over his shoulder while Jack wrote down everything that Hannibal had said.

“And where do you plan on going, Dr. Lecter?”

“It was nice to speak to you again, Agent Crawford. Please do not take too long collecting your finest china. He needs medical attention.”

Before Jack could ask anything else, the line went dead.

“He turned his phone back off,” Zeller said, finger reaching out to the computer. “But we have the address.”

“A cabin, near a river, five hours outside of New York City,” Price grumbled.

Chapter End Notes

Lengva pasakyti, bet ne padaryti- Easier said than done

Jūs žiūrite per rožinius akinius- looking through rose colored glasses

Aš tave myliu, protingas berniukas-I love you, smart boy

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

“Where’s your jacket?” Will commented, eyes looking over the light summer dress and bare feet that followed along the rough icy asphalt without issues.

The girl smiled with a small giggle, but didn’t reply. Simply kept up with his pace. She found the double yellow line in the middle of the road and she stepped onto it, walking as if it were a tightrope, arms out to keep her balance. Will found himself slowing his walk to keep at her speed.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys. Hope you like this chapter. Kinda been a long week for me. My great-grandpa died and I've been trying to take care of that and then I caught what I hope is the flu and I've been sick in bed for the last like 4 days. Who knows. I could have gotten anything from those nursing homes or maybe from helping take care of both my siblings who were sick before I was. So, don't mind my fever fogged head. Enjoy. Love you all and than you for all of the lovely comments from the last chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

LOSING YOU
TERRIFIES ME

Alana raced into the hospital, heels clicking on the floor as she walked. Margot had begged her not to go, but she had to see him. She had to know if he was alright. She had to know if Hannibal had kept his promise.

Alan turned the corner to find a small group of people sitting in the lobby. Among them were Zeller, Price, Jack, Molly and her son. Each of them looked worn and weathered as if they had been battered against rocks.

“You found him?” she asked with a breath of air, calling everyone’s eyes to her. “It’s really him?”

“It’s him,” Jack verified with a small nod.

Alana’s heart jumped in her chest and she moved closer to the group. “Where? I need to see him.” She tried to move past Jack, but Jack stuck out his arm to catch her. “Jack,” she scolded, pushing her brown hair from her face.

“We don’t know his mental state yet,” Jack explained. Alana gave him an incredulous look and he held out a black leather notebook that was in his other hand. “I would advise taking a look at this before you proceed.”

Alana’s brow furrowed, lips pursed as she snatched the book from his hand. She opened it and glanced down to find her meteor’s scrolling cursive across the pages. Handwriting that she knew better than she wanted to. With a exhale, she began to skim the words, head tipping as she read over all of Hannibal’s medical notes on Will.

“Amnesia,” Alana muttered softly, turning more pages. “Violent outbursts brought on by the trauma. I can’t place the type of memory loss it is though. It could be Anterograde or Retrograde, possible traumatic amnesia. It looks like he has symptoms of all of them.” She turned another page to find a clock drawn in scribbles, Will’s own handwriting.

With one final page turn, Alan paused, eyes dancing over the rushed and hurried hand of Hannibal’s, scribbles that were barely readable in the swirls they were written in. It took a moment for Alana to finally separate the words and she read each one carefully.

“Bastard,” she hissed, closing the book. “I keep my promises, my ass.” Her attention snapped back up. “Is he awake?”

“No,” Jack answered softly. “But the moment he is, we are finding where Dr. Lecter went.”

“You can’t do that,” Alana argued, a hand going to her head as she tucked the notebook under her arm. The familiarity of this was a bit overwhelming. Fights that she had thought they had long since moved past coming back up again and again. “You have no idea how he will react. He’s been showing tendencies of violent outbursts when he forgets. He is trapped in that trauma from months ago. He’s not going to want to think about anything but that moment.”

“We have to find Hannibal. He already killed another girl,” Jack argued, voice rising slightly.

“You cannot put him back out in the field!’ Alana argued, voice rising as well. “You know you can’t Jack! He is not your bloodhound!”

“I don’t want any of you near him,” a small voice said somewhere behind Alana. She glanced back at Molly. “He’s coming home the moment he’s well and none of you are going to contact him. He is not going to work for any of you.”

“He’s not going to be the same person,” Alana threw out.

“I don’t care if he is or not,” Molly pushed. “You are bad for him. End of story.”

“I don’t think that is your call to make,” Jack pushed.

Molly rose to her feet with a scowl. “Until you are married to Will Graham, you have no say in his life.”

Police scattered the office, body bags and evidence markers, flashes of cameras. Will glanced around at the scene and then his eyes fell on an older gentleman sitting at his desk. His hair was silver and messy, not the normal slicked back that Will was so used to seeing it in. His nose had a *cut across the bridge and his lip was split, blood staining his chin, the forming of a black eye beginning. He looked tired, Will noted.*

"I was worried you were dead," Hannibal said. That was his name, wasn't it? Will was certain that was right, though he wasn't sure where he had seen or met this man before.

"Tobias Budge," Jack stated strongly, calling Hannibal's attention away from Will, "killed two Baltimore Police officers, nearly killed an FBI special agent, and after all of that, his first stop is here, at your office."

Will watched closely as Hannibal took a steadying breath. "He came to kill my patient." All three of them turned to look at the larger man that still lay on the ground, eyes wide and blank, neck snapped skillfully.

"Your patient," Will muttered, wishing he could pull his eyes away from the body. "Is that who Budge was serenading?" Finally his neck obeyed and he looked back to the man in the chair at his desk who was also holding at a cut in his thigh that Will hadn't noticed before.

Hannibal shook his head lightly, confused. "I don't know," he breathed, obviously still shaken by the attack. "Franklyn knew more than he was telling me. He told Mr. Budge that he didn't have to kill anymore." Hannibal swallowed with another shaky inhale. "And then he broke Franklyn's neck, and then he attacked me."

"You killed him?" Jack questioned, not at all gently.

Hannibal's yes was small, barely a whisper.

"Could Franklyn have been involved with whatever Budge was doing?" Will questioned in confusion, trying to make sense of the situation. Who were these people? How did he know their names? What had Budge done that was so wrong?

Hannibal's gaze lowered to his hands. "I thought this was a simple matter of a poor choice in friends."

"This doesn't feel simple to me," Jack grumbled, switching weight on his feet for a moment before turning away and leaving the room.

Will found himself stepping closer to the man, leaning against his desk with a sigh as he once more looked at the mess that had become of the once pristine office. How did he know it was pristine? Maybe it was the suit that Hannibal wore, a little ruffled, but otherwise looking entirely too perfect for having just been in a fight.

"I feel like I've..." Will trailed off, trying to find the right words just as he so normally did. "Dragged you into my world."

Hannibal shifted in his seat with a small sound of acknowledgement. "I got here on my own. But I appreciate the company." Hannibal met Will's gaze and instead of wanting to run like he normally did, eyes were so distracting, he felt a smile pull at his lips and he gave a small huff of laughter.

Will's eyes shot open and he tried to breathe, but found that no air could fill his lungs. The alarms were blaring and his hands scrambled to remove the foreign items from his body. The clamp on his finger, the needle at his wrist, the intrusive tube down his throat that was making him gag.

Hands fluttered over him as people rushed in, hands taking his and others holding down his shoulders. "Relax," a gentle voice said, messing with the tubing in his mouth. I need you to inhale deeply and exhale and we'll take this out."

Will did his best to follow the instructions of the brunette nurse with the concerned smile. Will exhaled and gagged as the tubing was pulled free, gasping as soon as it was gone. The burn was unpleasant, but at least he could rest back, eyes closed, chest heaving.

"How are you feeling?" the nurse asked as footsteps surrounded him, reattaching everything that he had ripped off in his struggle.

"Thirsty," Will rasped out, his throat feeling as if he had been swallowing rocks, something familiar about the conversation that he couldn't exactly place. He opened his eyes at a hand on his arm and took the small cup that was handed to him.

"Can you tell me your name and where you live?" the nurse questioned, taking the cup back after he had finished it.

"Will Graham," Will answered, once more closing his eyes. "I live in Wolf Trap, Virginia."

My name is Will Graham. It is 11:59 on New Year's Eve and I am home with my family .

"And how old are you, Mr. Graham?"

"42." His eyebrows creased as he thought about it for a moment. He couldn't recall having ever been asked these types of questions before while in the hospital. That was clearly where he was, but he couldn't quite seem to recall how he had gotten here. Something almost like a dream was floating towards the edge of his subconscious, something about an ocean, but not much else. "Or-or 43. I'm not sure what the day is." He exhaled deeply, hands reaching up to rub at his face.

"When is your birthday, Mr. Graham?"

"January 30th."

There was a light laugh from her. "Still 42, I'm afraid." Will's lips cracked into a faint smile before the smile dropped at a soreness in his jaw, as if something was bruised. He took the pair of glasses that she handed them and slipped them on. "Mr. Graham, I believe your wife and son are here if you would like to see them. If you aren't up for it, we can have them stay outside."

Will opened his eyes curiously, looking towards the open doorway to his room that was now empty save for the nurse. He could hear raised voices out in the hall, but he couldn't exactly make out who they were right away.

"Alana?" Will asked softly as her sharp voice carried into the room.

"You can't go in there Jack!" she shot out, her heels clicking down the hallway.

Will braced himself for the oncoming storm that was heading his way and let out a steadying breath as Jack Crawford stepped through the doorway and into the hospital room, his shoulders making him look like he wouldn't fit in any further.

"Jack," Alana said as she stepped into the room too, anger falling from her face at the sight of Will.

"Sir, I'm going to have to ask you to-"

"It's ok," Will assured, interrupting the kind nurse. "They can stay. Would you mind letting my family know I'm alright?" The nurse gave a small nod and pushed her way through Jack and Alana, disappearing from the room. "Hello Jack, Alana," he greeted.

Alana gave her kind, sad, small smile that she was so good at and stepped a little closer to the bed. "I'm glad you're alright. We were all very worried about you."

"Mind telling me what for?" Will asked curiously, looking around the room once more.

"You don't remember?" Alana asked, glancing back at Jack before her attention returned to Will.

"What should I be remembering exactly?" Will pushed his glasses back up onto his nose with a frown.

"Where did Hannibal go?" Jack demanded, voice stern.

"Jack," Alana hissed, hitting his arm.

"Hannibal?" Will's head tipped to the side in question. The odd name swirled in his head and he closed his eyes in thought. There was something strangely off putting about the name, but other than an unsettling feeling that he should know it, nothing was coming to mind. "I'm not sure who you're talking about Jack." Will finally answered, eyes opening.

"Like hell you don't," Jack said sharply, stepping closer to the bed. Alana reached out and grabbed Jack's arm. "Dr. Hannibal Lecter."

"Jack," Alana warned.

Will glanced between the two of them, brows furrowed. What was he missing? Who was Dr. Hannibal Lecter? It really was a strange name. Will shook his head in an attempt to get it to stop echoing about his skull.

"I'm sorry, Jack. I really don't know who you're talking about." There was some motion at the door and Will's eyes fell on Molly and Walter who were pushing their way in.

"I'm glad you're alright Will," Alana said quickly, always able to read a situation. "Jack, we need to let him rest." Alana pulled Jack from the room and Will didn't miss the dark look that followed the doctor and agent from Molly.

"He won't be bothering you anymore," Molly announced, turning to Will with a kind smile. "How are you feeling?"

"Like I'm missing something important," Will answered honestly, looking over his family curiously. This was his family. He knew it was, but this wasn't right. It didn't feel right. Will's eyes looked over the woman and her hesitant smile and then down at his stepson who was clutching a box in his hands.

Cluttered typewriters, tea sets that were missing pieces, clocks, some with shattered faces and stacks of old books.

Will closed his eyes at a momentary spike of pain in his head that disappeared just as quickly as it had come. “What do you have there, Wally?” Will asked curiously.

“This was with your things,” Walley replied, moving closer to the bed and holding out the box. “I was wondering if maybe we could go fishing again.” The young boy held out the box and Will reached out to take it. He opened the clasp and was met with lures that were of a remarkable quality. Old, handmade.

Will gave Walter a small half smile, closing the box. “Not with these. They’re expensive. But we can absolutely go fishing again.” He tousled Walter’s hair and Molly finally approached the bed. “How are you doing?” He reached out to her, hand resting on her hip, pulling her a little closer. “You look like you haven’t been sleeping.”

“Well, with the new dog, it’s been difficult. She doesn’t like anyone else. Fights with the others,” Molly replied with a small nod. “Izzy is a handful.”

“Izzy...” Will mused over the name for a moment, trying to bring the dog to mind, but came up blank. “Did I hit my head? There are blank spaces that don’t make very much sense.”

“We’ll discuss it at a later date,” Molly said, smiling kindly but the smile not reaching her eyes. “I’m sure the doctors would be able to tell you better than I could anyways.”

“What did you mean by not bothering me anymore?” Will asked curiously, eyes firm on Molly who looked a little at a loss for words.

“Jack abandoned you. Left you to your own mental devices,” Molly explained. “That’s not ok and it will not happen again.”

“Are you trying to alienate me from Jack Crawford?” Will blinked as the words left his mouth, phantoms of a past conversation he couldn’t quite place.

“He’s not good for you!” Molly argued, voice breaking as tears brimmed her eyes. “You can go back to teaching or fixing boats, but you are not going to be working cases for Jack Crawford.”

“I save lives,” Will shot back, unsure where his defense was coming from. Molly was right. It wasn’t good for him, but he felt the urge to fight it, some long forgotten instinct to push back.

“And I bet that feels good,” Molly said sharply.

Will stared at her, shaking his head at the thought that he had had this conversation before. “Generally speaking,” he found himself saying as if the words had already been laid out for him.

“And what about your life? I don’t care about the lives you saved, I care about your life. You save lives.” She scoffed, causing Will to frown. “At what costs? Look at where you are.” Molly stepped out of Will’s grip and wrapped her arm around her son’s shoulders. Will glanced around the hospital once more, more questions flooding his mind than answers.

“Who’s Hannibal?” Will asked, knowing he wasn’t going to get any further in their disagreement.

Molly's face quickly changed to one of shock and she licked her lips. "A nightmare," was her eventual reply, pulling her son with her to the door. "I'll come by to check on you tomorrow. Think about what I said, will you?"

"She just cares, you know." The voice made Will jumped and he turned to find a young girl sitting on his bed. 18 or 19. Wind-chafed, plain but pretty. Dark auburn hair. Freckles covered her cheeks, a jagged gash across her neck and her legs swung, unable to touch the floor from where she was sitting. "I wouldn't be too mad at her."

Will inhaled deeply, sitting up a little more in the hospital bed, glancing around the room for an answer as to where she had come from. She waited quietly for Will to say something, her icy blue eyes as piercing as the cold had been when Will had slipped under the ice of a lake.

"Don't remember me either, do you dad?" she asked, lips curling into a frown.

Will's brows furrowed and his mouth went very dry. "Dad?" he got out, looking towards the door as if someone would be there to help, to tell this poor confused girl that he was not her father. "I-I-I'm not your dad," Will stuttered out, a shaky hand removing his glasses and wiping them at the sheet that was on him in hopes that maybe the girl was a spot on his glasses and that maybe he was on very good medication for whatever had caused him to end up here in the first place.

The girl pursed her lips with a shrug. "Adopted dad," she corrected, a smile spreading over her lips. Will placed his glasses back on, breath hitching when he found the girl still there. She frowned. "How do you not remember me? After everything we went through." She snorted with hurt laughter. "Dad."

"Abigail," Will said, the word coming to his tongue without any notion as to where it had pulled the name. But it must have been hers because she smiled brightly, a smile that seemed like it wasn't used enough or at all for that matter. "What happened to your neck?"

Her pale fingers went to her neck and touched the scar that was there. "Some of my other dads did this to me," she answered. "Thank you for trying to save me both times. I know it must have been hard to watch me go through that twice."

"Watch what?" Will asked, eyes flickering between hers and the scar on her neck that was dripping blood as her fingers moved away, smearing the red across her throat.

"Sir, are you alright?"

Will jumped, breathing hard, looking to the door where another nurse was. Will's head whipped back to the side of his bed that was empty, the girl nowhere to be found, gone like smoke. "Yeah," Will answered, trying to catch his breath. "I'm fine."

* * *

"You can't just bombard him with questions Jack," Alana snapped, voice hushed after being looked at angrily by hospital staff. "What is wrong with you? His mental state is more fragile now than it ever has been."

"He knows where Dr. Lecter is," Jack muttered, completely ignoring Alana's outburst. "There's no way he doesn't."

“Jack, he obviously doesn’t remember.” Alana’s hand was pointing back to where Will’s room was. “People block off traumatic experiences all of the time.”

“Then we force him to remember.”

“You can’t force him to remember something!” Alana argued, a frantic hand pushing through her hair. “You never change, Jack. You can’t listen to anyone but yourself.”

“He has to remember Dr. Lecter,” Jack countered. “They were on a honeymoon get away for three months!”

“My husband,” Molly announced possessively, causing Jack to roll his eyes but not turn around, “does not remember Hannibal Lecter and it will stay that way.”

“What do you mean?” Alana asked softly, shock stilling her anger. “He can’t just go through life not knowing-”

“Dr. Lecter has done nothing but manipulate and hurt Will,” Molly pressed on, ushering her son to go sit over by Zeller and Price. “This is going to be the best thing for him.”

“I am not about-”

“Agent Crawford,” Molly cut in once more. “You were able to function just fine before Will and you are going to be just fine now. I appreciate you both caring about my husband, but this is what is best for him. If all of the bad is erased, then the nightmares will be gone, and the drinking, and the sleep walking, and the visions. Hannibal is more pain than what Will can handle.”

“So, you’re just going to pretend like this man never existed?” Alana questioned, shaking her head in disbelief. Molly gave a firm nod. “There’s going to be spots in his memory where he’ll have questions.”

“I was the youngest of several brothers. I am very well versed in lying,” Molly answered, folding her arms over her chest.

“You can’t do that to him,” Alana challenged, looking to Jack for some sort of help. “He doesn’t have to go back into the field, but you can’t lie to him about a past that never happened.”

“He’s going to come after Will,” Jack stated. “He will come for you.”

“I’ve survived worse than a hurt, love sick puppy.”

Alana gave a confused look at the vision of Hannibal that Molly put forward, finding it hard to see Hannibal in that light. The blood stained teeth and muzzle of a wolf, maybe.

“He is never going to know about Dr. Hannibal Lecter,” Molly enforced.

“And what if he remembers?” Jack tossed out.

“Then God better be real, because he will need to save us from the devil.”

“Have you decided what you want to do today?” Molly asked into the silence of the car ride. Will’s head twisted slightly from where it was pressed against the passenger side window to his wife.

“I think I would just like to rest,” Will answered before turning back to watch snow covered trees pass by him. A creek of water flowed freely over rocks and Will stared at it curiously, another sense of *deja vu* washing over him, though he wasn’t quite sure what from. Maybe just from knowing they were nearly home. “Maybe take the dogs on a walk.”

“That sounds like a good day,” Molly agreed, glancing over at Will before her eyes went back to the road to make a left hand turn. “And have you thought about work? You don’t need to go back right away.”

“I think I would like to go back to teaching,” Will answered softly. “Gives me the feeling of normality.”

“Alright.”

“You’re just going to go back to normal?” a voice said in the back of the car. Will sat up and glanced behind him to find the same girl that had been in the hospital with him sitting in the back seat beside Walter who was busy playing games on a tablet. “After everything that happened?”

“You keep saying that,” Will grumbled, rubbing at his face and under his glasses, wishing she would leave him alone.

“Keep saying what?” Molly questioned with a confused lit to her voice as she pulled up into the driveway of their house.

“Uh, nothing,” Will said quickly, eyes looking over the large house. It was familiar. It should be. It was his home. Well, it was Molly’s home, but it wasn’t quite right. The wood was old and weathered, the wrap around deck looking like it needed to be replaced. And the driveway was on the wrong side of the house. But it wasn’t. The driveway had always been right here, so why did Will feel like it should have been on the other side? He shook his head and got from the car. “I think I’m just going to go on a walk, clear my head,” he announced.

Molly watched the man carefully as he shoved his hands into his pockets, hunching his shoulders against the cold morning. His breath followed him through the air as he stepped back out onto the road and started down it.

“You should have gotten another jacket. It’s cold,” the girl said, chasing after Will.

Will glanced over her. Abigail was what he had called her, wasn’t it? And maybe that was her name because he had picked it for her. It had become fairly obvious to him that she was all in his mind. Some random manifestation that presented itself as his own kid, a kid he had never had.

“Where’s your jacket?” Will commented, eyes looking over the light summer dress and bare feet that followed along the rough icy asphalt without issues.

The girl smiled with a small giggle, but didn’t reply. Simply kept up with his pace. She found the double yellow line in the middle of the road and she stepped onto it, walking as if it were a tightrope, arms out to keep her balance. Will found himself slowing his walk to keep at her speed.

Her tongue was out in concentration, eyes down at her tiptoes. “It’s not as easy as it looks, dad.”

“I am not your dad,” Will stated firmly with a shake of his head. “You’re not even real.”

“I am as real as you want me to be.”

Will stared at her for a moment longer before starting off down the road again. She gave a sound of dislike at her game being dashed and raced after him, now back at his side.

“You know, I can tell that you’re trying to remember,” she said, vapor rising from her plush lips that were turning a shade of blue in the cold.

“Trying to remember what?” Will questioned, shivering at a breeze that picked up the fresh powder from the night before and dusted him with it.

“Everything that happened,” she answered with a smile, skin looking pale and sickly.

“You keep saying that. Nothing happened. I was attacked by someone while working a lead for Jack. I’m not sure what else you’re trying to get me to admit, Abigail.”

“I like when you call me Abby better.”

Will frowned and gave a huff of air. “I’m not calling you that. You’re lucky I named you at all.”

“It’s because you remember that you called me that name.”

Will stopped and turned to face the teen, licking at his cold chapped lips. “You’re in my head and I am crazy for talking back to you. I don’t remember you, you don’t exist.”

“Then explain why the house felt wrong,” Abigail challenged with a smug smile. “Why did you feel cold when you saw the creek? Why does everything seem foggy and familiar to you?”

“It’s my house. Of course it’s familiar to me,” Will argued, realizing how insane he probably looked talking to the middle of the street, so he began walking again.

“But it’s not the house you thought it would be, was it?” she taunted, bare feet pattering on the ground as she followed behind him. He shot her a dark look over his shoulder, informing her that it was time for her to be silent or to disappear, but she didn’t listen. She didn’t like to listen to him. What was the point of being her dad if she wouldn’t listen? But when did children listen to their parents? “What were you expecting, dad? A cliff side with a devastating fall to an ocean view? A lighthouse maybe? Or was it a cabin somewhere by a river with a spacious kitchen and someone there who reads you to sleep every night with tales in Italian?”

Will’s brows furrowed. “I’m not sure what you’re referring to.” He stopped once more in his steps, thinking over the words that she shoved into his mind. “The only person I know who speaks even the slightest bit Italian is Jack.” Will snorted. “And I can assure you that he has never read me a book in Italian until I was asleep.”

“Not Jack, dad. Hannibal.”

There was that name again. The one Molly refused to acknowledge. The one Jack had been so angry about. The one Alana was defensive about. A name that he had never heard before in his life. Dr. Hannibal Lecter is what Jack had called him.

“How do you know-” Will broke off as he found himself alone in the middle of the road, wind pushing around his curls and chilling him to the bone.

“I can help make dinner,” Will offered as he came down the stairs from where he had been sleeping, shadows of being trapped in a mental hospital clinging to his limbs.

“We both know that you don’t know a thing about cooking,” Molly said with a smile as she cracked some eggs into a stand mixer of flour.

“Pasta?” Will asked curiously, looking over Molly’s shoulder. She gave a small smile as she looked back at him, surprised. “There’s a really good wine sauce,” Will continued on naturally, wrapping his arms around Molly’s waist. “White wine, butter, salt and some parmesan. Some fresh basil might be nice too.”

Molly didn’t acknowledge Will’s comments. She paused for a moment and Will could sense a feeling of detachment surrounding her that made him release his hold of her. “Where did you learn that?” she asked after a moment of silence that made Will step away, rubbing at his elbow sheepishly.

“I don’t know,” he whispered softly, eyes firm on the floor as he searched his mind for an answer. “Maybe my dad made it once or something. I seem to remember a lot of the bad things he made. I’m sure there must have been some good things as well.”

“Can you set the table, dear?” she asked gently, but Will didn’t miss the fact that she wanted him out of the kitchen in her disposition. “Wally, come help set the table.”

The young boy jumped up from where he was seated in front of the tv and joined Will at the cupboards, Will passing the plates down to his hands so he could run to the table. Will followed with several cups, placing them down where Walter had placed the plates.

“Wally, after dinner did you want to play that game with the squares?”

“I’m going over to Danny’s tonight,” Walter replied, setting out the napkins that were ripped into odd shapes. “And the game is called Minecraft and they’re blocks.”

“Who’s Danny?” Will questioned as he placed the silverware down on the odd napkins.

“A friend from school,” the boy replied before heading back into the living room.

Will looked over to Molly for more answers and she simply shrugged, turning on the mixer and having to raise her voice to be heard. “Wally is going to sleep over at their house tonight.”

Will tipped his head curiously at a small puff of flour and watched as it settled across the counter.

Foggy and familiar.

“You met his parents once,” Molly insisted, though Will wasn’t sure if he could find a time where he had met any of Walter’s friends’ parents. “They were the ones with the boat.”

“Boat,” Will said with a nod though he was nearly positively sure that he had not met any of Walter’s friends’ parents and none of them had ever had a boat. “Right.”

The doctor had said that he might not remember the last little bit of time and that some memories might not return at all, so it was very possible that he had met these random strangers with a boat and that only made a headache begin to set in.

The night was cold against Hannibal's skin as he continued down the road, knee aching from how far he had been having to walk. He had gotten a ride or two from strangers far kinder than him, but they only would carry him to the next town. He still had a long walk, as he didn't want to actively hitch hike. It was just better if he didn't interact with people. The less people, the less witnesses.

But that didn't seem to stop a car from pulling up beside him, the window rolling down. Hannibal ignored it and kept walking. The car followed slowly beside him.

"Do you need a ride?" a voice called from the car. A man.

"I can manage," Hannibal answered, still not looking over at whoever was talking to him.

"You're limping and it's cold. You shouldn't be outside, especially this late. It's nearly one in the morning. You'll get sick."

Hannibal paused with a sigh, his breath floating away into the night sky before slowly turning towards the car. It was a Mercedes, something on the higher end. Something, that by the look of his younger face, was most likely a graduation present from his parents.

Hannibal smirked as he took in the boy's age. "Didn't your parents teach you not to talk to strangers?"

"They also taught me not to be rude." His smile was kind as he leaned over the seat and opened the door for Hannibal. Hannibal glanced around the empty road. The next town was another few miles out and this was the first car he had seen in several hours. There probably wouldn't be another and if there were, they were unlikely to stop. "Come on, get in. I don't bite very hard."

Hannibal's smirk widened at the comment, tongue swiping over his own teeth before he relented and climbed into the warm interior of the car, backpack going on the floor between his feet. He closed the door and settled into the car, holding his hands out the air vents to warm his frozen fingers.

"Where do I need to drop you off?" The kid was something pleasant to look at. Blond hair that reminded Hannibal of his when he had been younger and eyes that he couldn't exactly see in the dark.

"The next town would be fine," Hannibal answered. "I doubt you're headed in the same direction that I am."

The car pulled away from the curb and the engine hummed through the dark. "I'm Eric," the boy said, filling the air with a pleasant ambience. "You?"

"Anthony," Hannibal supplied easily, finally pulling his hands from the heater now that they were warm enough. "Why are you out so late? Shouldn't you be focused on your studies?"

Eric smiled and stole a look at the man beside him. "I'm actually heading back to school. I went home for the holidays."

"What are you studying?"

"I'm working on my bachelors at the moment, trying to get into a medical school," Eric explained, catching Hannibal's curiosity. He looked over the boy, head cocked to the side. His eyes trailed over the boy and then the interior of the car to find it remarkably clean and empty.

“No, you’re not,” Hannibal stated after a moment. “Your parents think you’re going to school, but you wouldn’t be out this late at night if you were trying to go into medical school. I hardly left my dorm because of how much homework I had to do, even during the holidays.”

Eric gave a small laugh. “You’re smarter than my parents.” He nodded, glancing at Hannibal again. “I dropped out of school a year ago. I just couldn’t stand them thinking that I was a failure. You’re a doctor?”

“Who is the girl?” Hannibal asked, directing the conversation away from himself as smoothly as he could.

“Girl?” Eric gave another laugh, making a turn that Hannibal quietly noted as going away from the closest town. “Not a girl.”

“A boy then,” Hannibal muttered, watching the road carefully to know where he needed to walk back from. “Your parents don’t approve, I am assuming.”

“Not in the slightest,” Eric agreed. “I would be disowned if they knew about Jared.”

“But Jared is in school,” Hannibal pointed out.

“I can’t visit him at the moment. He’s very busy.”

“He’s the doctor then.”

“A very smart doctor,” Eric answered, pulling over to the side of the road that was piled high with snow and dark without so much as a hint of a street lamp. “But like I said, I can’t visit him at the moment.”

Hannibal shifted slightly in his chair. He knew what was coming as soon as they had made the wrong turn. “Why can’t you see him, Eric?” Hannibal asked, adding the boy’s name in to make the connection between them something more than where it was going. Names created a personal association. Hannibal would be a person, not an object. It would give Eric the feeling of importance, of being heard. Hannibal knew it all too well. It was a trick he used on patients, a trick that his own victims had tried to use on him.

“He’s currently disposed.” Eric put the car in park and Hannibal tried not to notice when the headlights were clicked off, immersing them in darkness. Hannibal once more shifted in his seat, trying to make sure that he had all of the boy in his view.

“Eric, what happened to Jared?”

Eric’s hands gripped at the steering wheel and his eyes turned dark as he looked straight ahead into the night. “It was an accident.”

“Where is he now, Eric?”

“In that field.”

Hannibal glanced behind him and to where the snow was laid out flat, past a fence and sparkling in the extremely dim moonlight. “Do I remind you of him?”

Eric lowered his head against the steering wheel and gave a nod. “He had these sharp facial features and these brilliant eyes that would glow in the dark. They were terrifying. I had nightmares about them.” Eric looked up to Hannibal who sat calmly in his passenger seat, much to Eric’s confusion. By this point he would have had to lock the door to keep the men from running away. But not this man. This man simply looked on in mild amusement and curiosity, the same way that Jared had when Eric had said something out of the blue with absolutely no context. “You have the same eyes.”

“I am not Jared, Eric.” Hannibal’s voice was soft and relaxed. “And I will not replace him or the other men that you have hidden in that field.”

“But you could.”

Hannibal shook his head. “I promise that I am not something you want. I am a car crash, not a lullaby.” Hannibal reached for the door handle, but there was a loud clicking sound and the door wouldn’t budge.

“I didn’t say you could go, Anthony.”

“I would advise against what you are about to do, Eric,” Hannibal warned with a simple tilt of his head. “You are not the monster that I can be.”

“Shut up,” Eric ordered, hand reaching down and coming back with a knife that glinted in the moonlight. A steak knife, rusted and bent. Not of any type of quality that Hannibal would ever dream of purchasing.

“You’re not going to like how this ends, Eric,” Hannibal tried once more. He wasn’t really in the mood for this. He wasn’t in the mood for all of the danger that he so easily attracted. In all honesty, he was tired and wanted to sleep, which he had been hoping to do at the next town which was a little more out of the way now than it had been.

Eric didn’t say a word, simply got from the car, coming around to Hannibal’s side to open the door. “Get out,” he ordered. Hannibal obeyed, bag in tow and on the ground before the car door could shut it behind.

Eric’s hand rested against Hannibal’s chest and pushed him up against the side of the car, knife pressed against Hannibal’s throat with a familiar pressure. The same pressure that Will had used back at the pig farm. Something not yet fully decided in action. Hesitant, battling within themselves.

Eric stepped closer. “I can’t see him right now. But you remind me of him.” He stood up on his toes to match Hannibal’s height, breath mixing with Hannibal’s at the proximity.

Hannibal reached out easily, with such practiced hands it was nearly muscle memory. Both clasped the sides of Eric’s face and with a fierce twist and a crack of bones, Eric’s body went limp and Hannibal let it fall to the road.

With a deep breath, he looked out at the field that was oddly beautiful in the quiet night, something that could be a graveyard if it wanted to be, cradling the bodies in a bitter cold lace.

Hannibal snatched back up his pack, tossed it over his shoulder and started away, leaving the car running and the love sick boy with opened glassy eyes to be covered in his own white lace as the snow began to fall from the sky.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again to my sister and my wonderful beta, @PitaGonzalezMe on twitter.

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

> “He is narcissistic,” Jack offered with a shoulder shrug. “Eventually they get tired of people not knowing who they are.”
>
> “Not him. He won’t get caught. Not anytime soon.” Will pointed at the file and licked his lips as words swam through his mind, begging to be said aloud. “Even if he wants to, he won’t let himself slip like that. But he wants to be seen, has a dying need to be heard. He has an audience and he wants them to know him, really see him.”
>
> “Why?”
>
> “Because he’s found someone."

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

LOSING YOU
TERRIFIES ME

Sirens were what woke Hannibal from a sleep that wasn't that deep as it was. Several police cars by the sounds of it, traveling along the road just outside of the parking lot of the small hotel he was at.

He inhaled deeply, rubbing at his eyes, feeling a hollowness in his chest without a dark haired man curled into his side. He forced himself up and to the bathroom to shower. As tired as he was, someone had obviously found Eric's body. In a small town like this no one would be rushing about for any reason other than an emergency. He would need to move on.

His knee ached under him from his abuse of it. He knew better. He had to work with it to strengthen it back up, but he couldn't carry on the way he had been. There was pushing the limits for health and pushing the limits to be stupid and he fell into the latter category.

He rubbed at the bruising with a wince, checking the mirror to see how his forehead was fairing. It was relatively healed, nothing to be concerned over. And he simply had some bruising from Will's punch that was nothing to fret over for the time being, though the man had ended up being much stronger than Hannibal had given him credit for.

As he stepped into the hot spray of the shower, he thought over the last day or two of events that had taken place and let out a deep breath, hand going against the side of the shower to balance himself.

Will must be home by now. He would have just been at the hospital to be monitored until he woke. Hannibal was sure that Molly had already ripped him free of Jack's grip if anything he had learned about the woman proved true. After all, she did outsmart the killer he set on her just to get Will's attention. She could take care of Will better than Hannibal could.

Normally Hannibal wasn't one to let his grip go in a fight of something he truly wanted, but Will was his first. Will was full of firsts. The only exception to the rule, an exception that continued to grow.

Hannibal knew that he was wrong, that he had never been right for Will, that he was sick and twisted and he had infected Will, but there was something about having someone to finally understand him, see him as himself that made him never want to release Will. And for a long long time he had done just that. Pulled Will in closer and closer, claws digging into the man's flesh to keep him in place, but he couldn't do it anymore.

Not when each time Will forgot, Hannibal had to sink his claws in further. Not when something in the universe clearly didn't want them together. Or maybe it was Will himself that didn't want them together. Maybe Hannibal had been just as bad as Jack and had broken this man into so many pieces that he would never be put back together. His fragmented mind was all that was left.

Molly would straighten him out though. Molly and the doctors. He was sure Will would want tests done just as he had when he had encephalitis. Will had gone back to Dr. Sutcliffe multiple times before Hannibal had killed the doctor. Will wasn't one to stop searching until he found his answers. It was what drove Will mad. He needed those answers to sleep at night, even if the answers resulted in nightmares that drove the sleep from him. He was a child who couldn't stop asking why.

Hannibal turned off the shower and readied himself for the day, jeans and jacket. Not what he would prefer, but they were sturdy and would keep him warm as he walked on, taking every back road he could until he could reach another one of his safe houses, let himself rest and move on.

With one final wipe down of the hotel room and anything he touched, Hannibal left and went out onto the sidewalk letting more police cars pass him by without a second look in his direction. Because he wasn't a monster. Not in the daylight.

“What are you doing?” Molly questioned as Will hit the last stair and came into view. It was late afternoon, Will had been sleeping all morning and Molly had let the man sleep, thinking it had probably been a long time since he had dreamt of anything peaceful.

The border collie that Molly had claimed was difficult jumped from her bed that was away from the other dogs and made her way over to him, nuzzling her nose at his palm. He rubbed at her head with a small smile. He seemed to be the only one that the dog liked and he wasn’t bothered by that. It was nice to have something that was kind of his in this storm that was raging through his mind.

“Sit,” Will ordered, before moving over to Molly. “I have a class in...” Will looked over his watch, “an hour?” Will straightened his tie and Molly couldn’t help but note the different knot that he used. Full Windsor instead of his normal half. The same knot that Hannibal wore, though she wasn’t exactly sure how she knew, having never really met the man. But she had heard enough. More than enough.

Molly frowned at the comment and placed her phone aside. “I thought we talked about this? You were going to wait for a week or two.”

Will gave a small nod, eyes avoiding Molly’s face, though she was used to it by now. “I know. But I can’t sit here anymore. I need something to do.”

“There are plenty of things to do here Will.” She gave a faint laugh that had an underlying of being pissed off in it.

“I can’t watch TV anymore. I need to be doing something.” Will went to the counter and snatched up the keys to the car.

“The bathroom sink still needs to be fixed,” Molly offered. “That would keep you busy for a while. I’m sure we could find other things that need to be fixed. Like the AC.”

“It’s winter,” Will reminded as he pulled on his jacket. “And I will take a look at the sink when I get back.”

“Alright.”

Will stopped on his way to the door at a tone to Molly’s voice that he couldn’t quite place. He frowned and looked to the floor, shuffling his feet. “Look, I need to be doing something. I don’t know why this is the something that I need to be doing, but it is. I can’t sit in this house anymore. I need something to keep me distracted so that I don’t think about certain things.”

“What certain things?” Molly asked, tone darkly curious as if she didn’t really want to know but she needed to for some reason unknown to Will.

“Just some nightmares I’ve been having. They’re nothing,” Will assured, not really wanting to get into the demon monster that haunted his dreams. A wendigo with skin as dark as pitch, horns tall and reaching for the sky and eyes red as blood, drinking Will in every time they looked at him.

“And teaching a class about living nightmares is going to help?”

“I-I don’t know,” Will finally got out, shaking his head and reaching for the door. “But it’s stable and something I know I am good at. I’m going to be late.” He pulled open the door and was about to close it behind him before thinking better of it. What kind of a man was he to treat his wife in such a way? He moved back to the couch and leaned over it, placing a kiss to Molly's cheek, muttering a goodbye and heading out into the chilled afternoon air.

The sun was hidden behind grey clouds, giving the snow around him a sleepy kind of dreamlike yellow color. It made him want to climb back into bed and sleep the winter away in hopes of warmer days to go fishing in.

He climbed into the car and rested his hands on the steering wheel, the item feeling odd in his palms as if he hadn't driven in months. He started the car and pulled from the driveway, starting the nearly hour long drive to the FBI Academy.

The radio played softly, a nice break up to the silence around him.

"Now I'm stuck in this hotel room," Will sang along softly, turning onto the main road, hands patting at the steering wheel in time to the music. "By a cold neon light. And I've been waiting for an answer, but it won't come tonight."

He trailed off as he glanced around curiously at the newly paved road. When had they done this?

"How am I supposed to love you when I don't love who I am?"

A guitar strummed in the firelight and the scent of home cooking was strong.

"Sing it for me. Please?"

The accent was thick, something implacable. Something comforting. Something that floated around him and let him drift off to sleep without a care of being awoken terrified. And even if he was, that voice would still be there when he woke to chase the monsters away.

A horn blared and Will pulled the steering wheel, slamming on the breaks as a truck passed him, going the opposite direction. Will moaned, a hand going to his head where a fluttering pain was.

Did he doze off? He had drifted into the other lane. Maybe he should call out from work and go back home. Maybe he wasn't quite ready for this. Maybe Molly had been right.

He inhaled deeply and took in his surroundings. He was nearly to school. He could think about this later. He had a class to teach and he had to make sure he was in the right mindset for that. He needed to prepare, not think about a disembodied voice.

* * *

"The Norfolk Collector," Will said, the projector clicker in his hand. He leaned back against his desk, straightening his glasses, avoiding all the eyes that were on him from the random formation of students taking notes. "This man's name was Dr. Colton Durret." Will clicked to the next picture and glanced back over his shoulder to see an older man with large coke bottle glasses from the 70's.

"Colton Durret was what many of you would probably refer to as an Angel of Death," Will continued, trying to ignore the person who was once more darkening the door of his classroom. "He was a profound pathologist. Did well in school, taught himself many languages, rejected god and was rejected in turn by his peers."

There was a pointed look from Jack at the similarities between Durret and Will. Will cleared his throat and turned away from the door to the projector screen. He quickly changed the slide to an older woman.

"This is Janet Adkins, 45 year old suffering with Alzheimer’s. His first victim. Colton Durret was a firm believer in Euthanasia. According to him, his collection count is 130.”

His eyes met Jack’s for a moment over Will’s shoulder, quickly looking away before he had a chance to be sucked away in his gaze, before he stole secrets that he never wanted. But there was a hint of dislike in Jack’s gaze and Will couldn’t help but place it as something personal, the idea of euthanasia bitter across Jack’s person.

“And I am calling it a collection because that is what he thought of these people as,” Will stated, hitting the next slide where there was a list of all 130 names. “These were not people who needed help and he was gracious enough to help them, which distinctly removes him from the realm of Angel of Death. These were people to add to his resume, to his idea of self-importance. That the world needed him when he had been so rejected in his past. Another piece of memorabilia of something that he had done right.”

“What can I do for you Jack?” Will asked as he gathered up the files on his desk and shoved them into his bag as his class was dismissed and filtered out of the room.

“I didn’t think you would be back here so quickly,” Jack commented, looking around the classroom as if it were foreign to him, as if this weren’t the first place that they had really spoken.

“Stability is important in my life,” Will informed him, the speech he was certain he had said over and over again to the man. “What can I do for you Jack?” The words were said with an annoyance in them, something that Will wasn’t exactly sure where it came from, but was not wrong in how he felt. He pulled his bag over his shoulder and scooped up his laptop, tucking it under his arm.

“I came to ask for some help with a case,” Jack replied, causing Will to roll his eyes as he made his way from the classroom.

“At least you didn’t interrupt my class this time with your ambush.” Will removed his glasses from his face and hooked them into his shirt, pulling a pair of gloves from his jacket pocket. “I believe my wife was very clear about not letting me work for you. And I personally do not want to work for you.”

“I need help finding the Chesapeake Ripper.”

Will paused, a hand on the door leading out to the parking lot. He looked down at his feet with a deep breath, mind alight with a fight. A want to continue the case he had sunk so much time into and to honor his wife’s wishes and keep him sane.

“I’m sorry Jack,” Will finally said, pushing open the door as the end of their conversation. “I can’t help you anymore.”

Will’s eyes were closed firmly, but he couldn’t sleep. He was trapped back in case files, back at crime scenes, back in... Baltimore Maryland? That wasn’t right.

Will shook his head to clear the idea from his mind as he returned to the artistic intentions of the Chesapeake Ripper, body after body. Ones that he couldn’t exactly place as being the Ripper’s, but knowing full well that they were. He couldn't exactly trace his own leaps in his thought process though. The evidence normally carried him, but this time there were blank spaces that he couldn’t fill. Spaces that he desperately wanted to understand.

There was a girl, in a field, mounted on a stag head. Something so utterly different from the Ripper, but something also so very Ripper. And the organs missing were not what Will was thinking of. There were millions of murders where organs went missing or were ripped from the body.

It was the beauty of the killings that stuck out to Will more. Something carefully crafted and painted and for some reason he felt like they had been sculpted just for him. As if he were the Ripper’s only patron, the only one who could see. No, not see. The only one who cared to take notice, to understand.

Paint and charcoal, pastels and ink.

Beautifully created imagery that was a callback to Renaissance paintings of old. Increased awareness of nature, a revival of classical learning, and a more individualistic view of man. The mastery of illusionistic techniques, a depth to the art that only Will could see. And as gruesome as it was, the artist did respect the nobility of Man, his own twisted form of Humanism coming through.

“I feel like you might recall my sketch of Achilles Lamenting the Death of Patroclus.”

Will’s eyes shot open and he sat up, looking around the room to find that Molly was still fast asleep and that the voice did not belong to anyone else. Another disembodied voice, another projection conjured up by his own mind.

Will rubbed at his tired eyes that were burning slightly and pushed from the bed, feet touching the cold wooden floor. He stretched and wandered from the room, finding himself in front of his laptop.

Curiosity pulled at him as he typed in the name of the artwork that his mind had somehow produced, though he wasn’t sure where he had ever heard it before. He was not very familiar when it came to art or artists, but maybe he needed to learn more about this man if he was going to catch him. He obviously loved old art.

Catch him? Will exhaled deeply, lowering his head into his hands as he waited for his search to load. He shook out his hair, feeling the stiffness and ache from it having been plastered against the back of his head for several hours.

Will wasn’t going to catch him. That wasn’t his job, not anymore. His job was to teach others how to catch him. Teach them what he did, what he could do, his stupid little gift that was more pain and trouble than it was worth. Something that you couldn’t teach, but did people want to know how he did it, his little parlor trick.

He opened his eyes and looked over the computer screen, clicking on images and pulling up the painting. Gavin Hamilton was the artist, a name Will didn’t recognize, but the artwork he did oddly enough. Though not in the color that was before him and the faces weren't quite right either.

Long artistic fingers held tightly to a pencil, the light sketching creating a scratching sound in the quiet office space. The fireplace was warm and cast a lovingly shadowing glow over sharp cheekbones and flickering brightly in the scalpel on the desktop.

Will stood to the side of the desk, watching curiously at the artist's work as shading was added to a cloth of some sorts, draped over a man who must have been dead. It was him and this man beside him who he just couldn't seem to find the face of through the dim lighting of the room.

"Achilles Lamenting the Death of Patroclus," the man explained, moving his hand away from the drawing so that Will might see it better. "Whenever he's mentioned in the Iliad, Patroclus seems to be defined by his empathy.

"He became Achilles on the field of war," Will stated, head tipping to the side to watch the man continue his work. "He died for him there, wearing his armor."

The man gave a small sideways nod at the accuracy of the story. "He did." There was a small pause. "Hiding and identity is a constant theme throughout the Greek epics."

"As are battle tested friendships," Will stated, the words coming out slow and calculated as if he needed to make sure that everything coming out of his mouth was absolutely perfect in the presence of this man who was still busy drawing the romantical whimsy.

The man stopped at that, lowering his pencil and looking up at Will, face still hidden behind shadows that would not disappear even though there was more light from the fire to uncover the man's face.

"Achilles wished all Greeks would die, so that he and Patroclus could conquer Troy alone. " Will was quiet as dark eyes landed on him, meeting his for a fraction of a moment, something ruby red in them before Will tore his gaze away. "Took divine intervention to bring them down," the man continued on, not seeming bothered by the defense Will often shielded himself with.

Will's hand opened and closed a few times as he tried to think of something to say back to this man, feeling as if the story was more closely related to them than Will could fully place. Will glanced over to the fire, the flames calling him forward.

"This isn't sustainable," he muttered.

Will blinked several times, breathing hard, the palm of his hand digging into his right temple at a pounding there. He closed the laptop to dim the light that was brighter than what his head wanted.

His hands moved as if they had been trained and his thumbs hooked together until his index finger was touching a specific point on his wrist. He pushed into the point and a clarity overcame his mind, only for confusion to rush in at how he knew how to find this release.

He glanced over where his thumb was pushing into his wrist, long artistic fingers replacing his. His eyes gleaned around the room to find someone else there with him, but he came up empty. His eyes dropped back to his wrist and they were once more his fingers.

“I couldn’t sleep last night,” Will announced as he stepped into Jack’s office without knocking. Jack glanced up from his paperwork, hands folding on his desktop, eyebrows raised as he waited for further explanation to the several questions that were now in his mind. Will pulled off his coat that was covered in snow and tossed it aside on a chair, hands rubbing at his face and running through his curls. “I couldn’t stop thinking about the case.”

“You don’t have a case, Will. You, Alana and your wife have been very clear that I am not to give you any more work to do. It unstables you,” Jack said back calmly, though the curiosity was still heavy in his tone.

“That doesn't stop my mind from wandering. It’s very good at that.” Will rested his hands on his hips and sighed deeply, looking at Jack, but not anywhere near the man’s eyes. How he hated eyes. They were portals to hells that he never wanted to visit, to a person’s own personal inferno that was theirs to suffer in alone.

“Necessita c'induce, e non diletto .”

Will glanced around the room at the words that sounded like they were said right in his ear, the scent of a live fire bright in the room and something else. Books and wine. Cooking possibly. Something expensive and finely made.

“Will,” Jack said sharply, pulling Will back to the present. No fire, no wine, no books, just a cold winter day with an annoyed FBI agent. “What did you drive all the way down here to tell me?”

“I have a profile for the Chesapeake Ripper,” Will answered, voice quick as if he wanted to get this over with. And maybe he did. The quicker he let Jack know about the profile, the quicker he could go back home.

Jack sat back in his chair, a hand covering his mouth, waiting for Will to continue.

Will licked his lips, suddenly nervous to be put on the spot even though that was where he had asked to be. “Uh, uh, uh,” he stuttered, “this man will be between 40-50. He will have money. Lots of money, old family money, but also money from his medical background. He will be in high society. He will be polite and able to hide anywhere he wants, but he won’t. He’ll stand out on purpose. He’ll be charming and captivate a room.”

Jack listened closely, doing his best not to accuse Will of still knowing where Hannibal might have been. Jack wasn’t sure if Will could describe the man anymore to a T than he was. It bothered Jack if he was being honest. Will knew, Jack was certain of it. Would bet his life on it. Will remembered and was pretending to give Hannibal time to escape. He could still recall clearly the conversation they had had a few months prior to Hannibal’s escape. Will admitting that he told Hannibal to run because he wanted to run away with Hannibal... Manipulated and tricked little broken pony.

“He will be foreign, most likely from Europe,” Will continued, starting to pace, one hand sliding into his pocket as the other waved about as he spoke.

Curious, Jack shifted the other way in his chair. “And how did you come to that conclusion?”

“He’s artistic,” Will explained, the word *artistic* clicking as it was enunciated. “He pulls heavily from the Renaissance period. He would think of this age as something above man, something that is the way life should have been lived but is lost to time. He tries to live up to that time. He holds court like a king anywhere he goes. A king without a throne, his domain wherever he places his feet.” Will inhaled deeply, looking to Jack to see if the man was still listening. Seeing that he was, Will continued on. “He would still hold a position of power. Something that lets him hide in plain sight. Something that allows him to work with people, that allows him to be a person that is depended upon. Probably still in the medical field.”

“Will,” Jack interrupted, making Will’s feet stop in their pacing that was going to leave a dip in the floor if Jack let him continue. “This isn’t your case.”

Will’s face scrunched up with a dark look. “This is what you want, isn’t it? My mind at your disposal? I’m offering it to you free of charge, Jack.”

“It doesn’t matter what I want,” Jack explained, sitting forward in his chair, hands folded back in his chair. As much as he would give to have Will back on his side, it wasn’t possible. Not to mention the fact that Will was just spouting back everything that Jack already knew about Hannibal. “What matters is your mental health and I am not breaking you again.”

“You didn’t break me,” Will shot back, head shaking in dismissal. “I feel fine. Just restless, like I’m missing something else that should be obvious to me.”

“Maybe sleep?” Jack offered with a deep breath, removing himself from the chair behind his desk and coming around to face Will who took a quick step back. “Will, go home. Put this from your mind. Molly will never let you come back here if I let you help again.”

“But I want to help Jack,” Will insisted. “I can help.”

“By staying in your classroom. No more field work for you.”

“At least let me look at the files,” Will tried once more, unsure why he so desperately wanted to help, to find this killer. This killer had been the reason for his issues, all of his mental breaks, all of his nightmares. Maybe if he could put the Ripper away, then the bad would go away. It was a lie he had to keep telling himself. “I look at crime scene photos all of the time for my class. I can handle a case file, Jack.”

Jack sighed, rubbing at his jaw in thought. He shouldn’t, but he was never one to not take help where help was given and he definitely wasn’t a fool to reject Will’s observations. They were valuable.

“Only the case file, no field work,” Jack stated firmly.

Will gave a small nod and watched as Jack gathered together several things on his desk, closing them up in a manila envelope before handing it over to Will, who took it quickly. Will flipped open the file and blinked several times, taking in the girl that was on display in a mall.

“Where was this?”

Jack watched Will curiously as the empath flipped to the next picture. He so desperately wanted to see if Will had been there. If Will knew about the latest victim. If Hannibal had said anything about it.

“New York,” Jack replied.

“That’s a little further than he’s killed before.”

The girl was blonde, young. Early twenties at the oldest. Looked well off with a beautiful summer dress on over her sickly pale skin. It didn’t appear like there was anything physically wrong with her. She was in one piece, the only thing out of place being the way her neck was broken, not snapped though. The life had been choked out of her, slow, painful. By the way the bruises were shaped, Will wondered if maybe the Ripper, if this had been him at all, had played with her. Bringing her back to life so she was conscious once more, just to cut off her air and send her back under until he was finally done with her.

“What makes you think this is the Ripper?” Will asked softly, turning to the next picture of the bottom of her bare feet that had holes in the heels. “He drained her blood?”

On the china plate was a half of an orange that had been hollowed and something that looked like chocolate pudding was in the middle, topped with whipped cream.

"*Sanguinaccio Dolce.”*

“Sweet black pudding,” Will muttered under his breath, unsure where the words came from or what to make of them. He shook his head and flipped to yet another picture of the young girl on an autopsy table, torso mutilated beyond recognition, having been hidden under the summer dress.

“What did he take?” Will pushed, still waiting for Jack to give him an answer.

“Blood, kidneys and liver. There was GHB in her system.”

Will’s lowered the file in thought, doing his best not to let the images of the massacred body cling too tightly to his mind. “Were other victims drugged?”

“Some of them,” Jack answered with a nod. “I think it depended on how much he disliked the person. His more brutal murders didn't have anything in their systems when they died.”

Will closed the file and his fingers tapped on it a few times while he placed things together, sorting out the corners of the puzzle first. He reopened the file and pulled out the picture of the girl posed as a mannequin.

“This one is different from the others,” Will said after a moment, turning the picture slowly around in his hands, trying to get a slightly different angle on the puzzle. “It’s still him, but there’s something wrong with it.”

“We think that he was trying to keep us away from where he was really located,” Jack explained. “Like he was-”

“Trying to create an alibi for himself?” Will finished with a question, tipping his head the other direction. “No. That’s not right either. This was hurried. He didn’t take his time with this one. This one was desperate, needed. Something to tone down his anxiety, if he’s capable of feeling such a thing.”

“So an addiction.”

Will's face screwed up in dislike at the idea Jack was putting forward. "He's not addicted. He has cooling periods of two to three years at a time. He doesn't need to kill. He wants to kill. But with her..." Will trailed off, putting the picture back into the file and pulling out another out, eyes flickering across it, memorizing every mark that was left behind, any tell of the Ripper, his signature in the bottom right hand corner of his portrait. "He was not as put together when he killed her, almost as if it was a spur of the moment idea. No. That's not quite right."

Jack exhaled as Will contradicted himself, obviously not as sold on the idea as Jack was that Hannibal was just as big a junkie as the next person was. Everyone had their thing and this was Hannibal's.

"It was planned..." Will trailed off.. "It was..." Will stared at the floor, trying to place his finger on what exactly he was feeling, what this killer's design was. "His motive is complicated on this one." Will rubbed at his stubble. "She did something that sealed her fate. He wasn't going to let her live, but what he wanted her for was different. It wasn't a need, it wasn't to create a masterpiece, it was a want to correct society while also trying to place a distance between him and his crimes here. But at the same time, he wants it seen, he wanted it found and noticed. It's like he almost wants to be caught."

"He is narcissistic," Jack offered with a shoulder shrug. "Eventually they get tired of people not knowing who they are."

"Not him. He won't get caught. Not anytime soon." Will pointed at the file and licked his lips as words swam through his mind, begging to be said aloud. "Even if he wants to, he won't let himself slip like that. But he wants to be seen, has a dying need to be heard. He has an audience and he wants them to know him, really see him."

"Why?"

"Because he's found someone," Will tossed out, the idea coming to him out of the blue. But it made sense. "This was for that person, whoever it is. Maybe a friend, maybe a lover." Will gave a shrug. "Uh, he wants to impress them. Wants them to see that he's his own artist. Not just one who can copy works of the greats."

"So, this person," Jack began, testing the waters carefully, eyes narrowed on Will who was acting fairly calm for the conversation they were having. "Can he see the Ripper?'

"Not the way the Ripper wants him to," Will answered with a small nod, not catching the pronoun that Jack had used. "They might not even be aware that the Ripper knows who they are. Oblivious to his advances, whatever they might have been. It's his love letter."

"Like the one in Italy?" Jack asked curiously, waiting for Will's reaction.

"Italy?" he asked softly, closing his eyes. "I don't recall the Ripper ever having been to Italy. Unless you are referring to his past, then it's possible. I did say European."

"There was a murder in Italy a year or so ago. One that I am positive is the Ripper. He murdered a young man and twisted his body and limbs inside out to look like a heart. Displayed it in the Norman Chapel in Palermo."

There was a heartbeat. It was loud and echoing through the chapel of the Italian church, the floor crimson and marked with skeletons. Atop the engraving on the floor is a man's mangled body, missing limbs, twisted into an anatomically correct heart, bleeding upon its easel made of a trio of shining swords.

Will walked around it carefully, trying to understand.

"I splintered every bone, fractured them... dynamically," he whispered as he circled the artwork. "Made you malleable. I skinned you." He could hear the knife cut through the skin. "Bent you, twisted you and trimmed you." The cracking of bones now made of dust. "Head, hands, arms and legs." He gave a small laugh. "A topiary."

Will hesitantly stepped closer, arm slowly reaching out, fingers searching.

"This is my design."

Fingers finally splayed against the body, still warm and sticky with blood. Will's horror quickly changed to curiosity as the faux organ heart beat beneath his fingers, alive.

"A valentine written on a broken man."

Will groaned, the hand that had been holding the folder dropping what it held and going to his head as he doubled over in blinding pain. The pictures and reports scattered across the floor, the sound deafening in Will's ears.

"Will," Jack said, stepping forward, a hand taking the man's shoulder. "Are you alright?"

"Italy," he whispered. "I was in Italy, but I've never been to Italy Jack."

"Alright." Jack led Will to a chair and helped him into it then went back to pick up the mess on the ground. "This was a bad idea. We're not doing this again."

"I can help," Will argued, blinking tears from his eyes.

"Not in this condition. You need to go back home and rest." Jack sighed and tossed the messy file onto his desk. "I am trying to do the right thing for once Will. Go back home."

"But Jack-"

"Home."

"What are you reading?" Margot's soft monotone voice asked. Alana sighed and closed the notebook that had Hannibal's writing in it. She could feel the younger woman's hand take her shoulder with a reassuring squeeze. "You've been closed up since you went to see Will."

"He's suffering from some sort of amnesia," Alana explained, her own hand going to cover her wife's. "I've been trying to figure it out from the notes that Hannibal kept, but I can't seem to put my finger on it."

"Hannibal's notes?" Margot asked curiously, receiving a squeeze at her hand from Alana.

“Will doesn’t remember Hannibal. None of it. According to Jack, Will doesn’t remember going to Italy to track down Hannibal. All of that was erased.”

“Maybe he’s the one with the blessing,” Margot offered out thoughtfully. “I think all of us wish we could forget about Hannibal.”

"He doesn't remember any of it. Not the mental Institute, not the court hearings, nothing. It's almost as if he is picking and choosing what he wants to remember."

"Pain is difficult to live with. His head has always been a mess. Mayne it's trying to clean itself up and the first thing that needed to go was Hannibal," Margot suggested. "Has Hannibal been found?"

Alana shook her head with another sigh. "No. He has not."

"And are you worried about that?"

"He always keeps his promises," Alana answered, staring out of the window to where their son was playing with Winston, the only dog Alana hadn't been able to give away.

"We can move again if you would like," Margot offered. "Though, I don't know if we can run forever."

"We cannot run forever," Alana agreed.

"Nor should you."

Both Alana and Margot froze at the voice, neither wanting to turn around, their hands tight in the grips they had on each other

"Hello Margot, Alana," the accented voice continued. "Morgan looks like he's doing well."

"How long have you been there, Dr. Lecter?" Margot turned around and stared at the man who didn't look anything like how she had expected to see him.

No suit, no tie, no slicked back hair. No shiny shoes and a tall, strong stride. Nothing that would place this man as Hannibal Lecter.

Instead she found a man, using the doorway as a crush, one leg favored over the other. Hair was messy and in his face, needing to be combed. He had a cut across his forehead that was underlined with a bruise.

His immaculately pressed suit was replaced with jeans and an old beat up, second hand coat that wasn't warm enough for the winter and a pair of hiking boots.

"There's no need for such formalities," the man said, head resting against the door frame, tongue flicking out to try to wet his chapped and dry lips. “And long enough to hear that Will doesn’t remember me. It is a shame, isn’t it?”

Margot tipped her head to the side with a small smile covering her lips. “You look a little run down, Hannibal.”

Alana rose from her chair at those words to take in the killer, ready for all of his glory, but was met with a mortally wounded Ares instead of the steadfast Hades she had come to see him as. Though he didn't need the ego stroke of being compared to the ruler of the underworld. Instead he looked like he desperately needed some water and to sit down. So human after all.

"I wasn't the only person who rejected and abandoned him, why should he pick me to forget?" Hannibal continued on, ignoring Margot's comment.

Before Margot could stop Alana, not that she really wanted to, Alana stepped up to Hannibal, heels clicking on the hardwood, hand connecting to his face with a loud echoing smack. Margot stared as Hannibal simply returned Alana's cold gaze, his cheek no longer wind whipped red, now a deep pink from Alana's slap.

"You broke your promise," Alana hissed, raising her hand once more. Hannibal didn't so much as wince as he allowed the hand to assault his face once more. He stumbled over, arms clinging to the door frame for support, only to the sink to the floor, utterly spent. "You promised me you would keep him safe. You abandoned him."

"I did not," Hannibal argued, voice collected as ever, though scratchy from need of water. "As you said..." He breathed deeply, arm circling around his middle with a wince. "I promised to keep him safe. He is safe, isn't he?" Alana watched curiously as his knees pulled in closer to his chest as if he were trying to sink into the fetal position, but whatever was wrong with him wouldn't allow it.

"How is he safe?" Alana questioned, lowering herself to her knees, ignoring the way her knees creaked from injuries she had received from being pushed out of a window.

"I couldn't take care of him anymore. If you read my notes, then that should have been quite clear to you." Hannibal exhaled deeply through his nose, skin now pale and sweat glistening on his brow. "I got him the medical help he needed. Medical help I could not provide."

"What happened to you Hannibal?" Margot asked, interest winning out over wanting to be cold as stone. "What happened to our Achilles?"

"I'm afraid Paris' arrow has found its mark." Hannibal gave a weak smile, his other arm now clutching around his center as well.

"He needs medical help," Alana said into the room as if it weren't obvious, but there was nothing in her tone to offer that she was suggesting they help him. Just a simple fact said in a simple voice.

"He will kill you when he's better," Margot reminded, stepping closer to the man who was now more mouse than monster. "Did you come to keep your promise, Hannibal?"

"Not today," he gasped out, looking sickly green. His breathing was fast now as both Alana and Margot looked on just to see what would happen. After all, wouldn't that be exactly what Hannibal would have done if their positions had been switched?

"So you came to us for help?" Alana asked, lips pursed in mock interest.

The nausea clawed at his throat, and he tried to force down the bile, but it was too late. His stomach contracted so violently that his hands went out to catch himself against the hardwood. His stomach empties out onto the expensive floor, dark and looking of coffee grounds.

“Internal bleeding,” Alana mused, unconcerned as she watched Hannibal get sick again. The power trip was odd, but not unwelcome. For once she wasn’t under his thumb. For once she was on top and he would have to take whatever she offered him, if she felt like offering him anything at all. “Your organs could be shutting down. A little ironic, don’t you think?”

“Poetic,” Hannibal answered, wiping at his mouth, throat raw. “And yes, Alana. I need your help.”

Margot tipped her head to the side, folding her arms over her chest and ignoring the smell of death that had filled the room from Hannibal’s expulsion. “We could end it all now. Let him die in the study.”

“It would make everything so much easier,” Alana agreed with a nod, watching Hannibal’s face pale once more as he gasped for air in hopes of relieving the nausea. “Jack could sleep again at night. We would be safe and wouldn’t have to move again. And Will would be free of your toxic grip.” Hannibal gave a small smile at the repulsive idea before his stomach purged itself again. “Such sweet sentiments.” Alana sighed with a frown. “Margot, call Dr. Jeffries.”

Chapter End Notes

Necessita c'induce, e non diletto- Necessity leads us, and not delight

Thanks again to my sister and my wonderful beta, @PitaGonzalezMe on twitter.

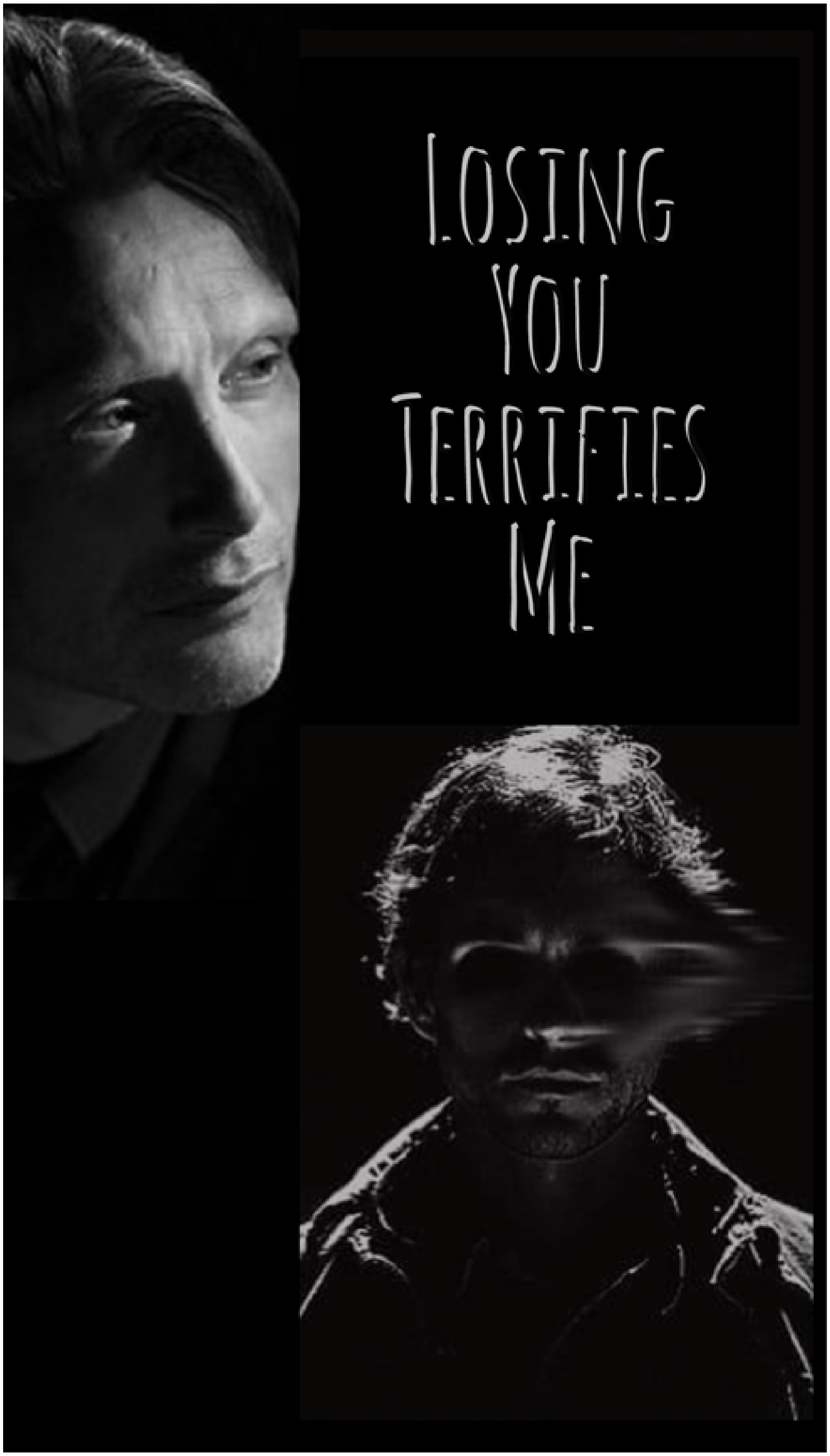
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

> “Stay with me Dr. Lecter. I want you to be present through this whole procedure. It’s only fair after what you did to my brother. Not to mention, won’t it be fun to see the inside of your knee after I’m done with your guts?”
>
> “The utmost.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes


Losing
You
Terrifies
Me

“You look familiar,” Hannibal noted aloud as one Dr. Liam Jefferies entered the room, looking over Hannibal with amused eyes and smile.

“It’ll come to you,” the man assured, steeping further into the room. He didn’t look like a doctor. Maybe a back alley gangster, but not a doctor. He pulled up a chair and sat across the expansive dining table from Hannibal, whose face was washed out and peaky. “Dr. Bloom said you have some internal bleeding. We’ll have to check that out. If you don’t mind, I would much rather skip the unneeded testing and just open you up.”

“I prefer that my hands are the only ones that work on me,” Hannibal muttered, glancing around to where both Margot and Alana were standing behind the doctor, silently listening. “But it seems that at the moment I am unable to.”

“Figured it out yet?” Jefferies questioned, head cocking to the side, his smirk still delighted, eyes looking hungry. Hannibal inhaled deeply, eyes intently on the man. There was something about his wide face and cheek structure that still placed him as familiar, but with the nausea that was molesting his senses, he still couldn’t bring anything to mind. “No matter.” Liam rose to his feet and moved around the table, hand going to Hannibal’s head. “Fever. What caused the bleeding?” Liam pulled a light from his pocket and flickered it on into Hannibal’s eyes.

“About two months ago I got shot,” Hannibal explained, catching Alana’s curiosity. “It was through and through, but it caused a lot of bleeding and I had to stuff the wound. It was too large for me to stitch it.”

“And you didn’t go to a hospital,” Liam added with a nod. “Not that I can blame you, Dr. Lecter. If I were in your shoes, I would avoid all medical facilities as well.” The light was thankfully returned to Liam’s pocket and Liam picked up Hannibal’s wrist, fingers pressing there to take his pulse.

“Before I was able to operate, I took a tumble into the ocean,” Hannibal continued, looking over to Alana who had moved closer to the dining table with interest in her features. “I may not have cleaned it well enough. I thought I was fine until a friend and I got into a fight. He punched the wound. I didn’t think much of it, but he must have ruptured something.”

“And is this,” Liam tapped at the healing cut on Hannibal’s head, ignoring the annoyed look from Hannibal, “from that tumble into the ocean.”

Hannibal shook his head and immediately regretted the movement. It made his head spin and with a cough, giving Liam enough time to step back, Hannibal emptied his stomach again into a small trash can that Margot had fetched him.

“I got hit by a car.”

“That would explain the leg,” Alana said, speaking for the first time in several hours.

“I can take a look at that as well, if you would like Dr. Lecter,” Liam offered. “Though I can’t promise it will be as good as new. I might rearrange a few things.”

Hannibal inhaled deeply, trying to ignore the unwelcome taste in his mouth as the answer finally clicked into place at the threat. He gave a small chuckle. “You must be Cordell’s brother,” he said breathlessly. “The last name?”

“Half-brother, on my mom’s side,” Liam replied with a small nod, fingers tapping on the wooden tabletop. “You tore off his face.”

A smile came to Hannibal’s lips. “He was trying to take a friend's face. I only returned the favor.”

“Let’s get you into surgery, Dr. Lecter.” Liam gave a smile as he straightened himself up. “It will be a pleasure to open you up and see all of the darkness collected inside.”

“I would like to be awake during the procedure, if you don’t mind,” Hannibal muttered. “We have to make sure you don’t get too carried away, don’t we?”

* * *

“Would you like a drink?” Molly asked sweetly as she swept into the kitchen from her morning run, the dogs racing into the house and going to their beds or chasing each other out of the room. Will gave her a confused smile. “It’s Saturday, you do not have to work and I would love to have a nice day with you with a drink. Don’t give me that disapproving look.”

“I’m not disapproving,” Will answered with a small chuckle, closing his laptop that he was busy setting up another PowerPoint on for class. “A drink would be nice.”

“Whiskey?” Molly questioned, heading over to their small bar.

“Wine,” Will replied, causing Molly to pause with a small frown, her chest contracting tightly.

“You don’t like wine,” Molly reminded gently, something dark swirling through her lungs. Jealousy maybe? *How ridiculous*, she chided herself. *He doesn’t remember him.*

“Been in the mood for that lately. Not sure why,” Will offered, getting to his feet and moving over to the bar, taking Molly’s hands in his and calling her unnaturally blank face to look at his. His eyes avoided hers though, they never met hers. Stayed on the bridge of her nose. It was the best way he had found to look at people without them thinking he was being unsociable. “Is everything alright?” He placed a kiss to her forehead.

“Fine,” she answered, a smile lighting up her lips, but not reaching her eyes. “One glass of wine coming up.”

Will gave a small nod, a wall between them that he couldn't seem to climb. He let her go and went back to the couch.

Izzy raced over to him and nuzzled at his leg until he reached out to scratch her head. "She seems to be doing better," he commented. "She's sweet."

"To you," Molly laughed, coming over to the couch and handing Will his glass of wine, keeping Will between her and Izzy. "She doesn't like me much." Molly sat on the couch, her own glass of wine in hand, leaning against Will.

"She's a good girl," Will muttered, pushing Izzy down as she tried to lick at his face. "Very well trained."

"That was all you darling," Molly assured, a careful hand reaching out towards Izzy. The dog gave a low growl and Molly pulled her hand back with a sigh.

"Hey," Will grumbled, pulling Izzy's face to look at him. "No." He pushed Izzy away who simply laid down on the floor by his feet with a small whine.

Will took a small sip of the wine, the fruitiness getting trapped in his throat with a familiar burn that made him want to close his eyes and try to place where it had come from, but Molly kept talking.

"How are your classes going? I'm sorry I haven't asked." Molly took a sip of her own wine, her head resting against Will's shoulder.

"It's been nice to have something normal for me to do," Will admitted. "A chance to get out of the house, do something I enjoy, not have to be sociable."

"How are you not sociable?" Molly asked curiously.

"I talk at them, not to them. They don't ask questions." Will gave a shrug with a small smile. "I don't know. It's just... Nice."

"As long as Jack is leaving you alone."

Will winced at this as he took another drink of his wine. "I've only seen him a handful of times. I say no, he leaves. No pushing," Will explained. It wasn't a lie. Jack had been ambushing him after nearly every class, but Will was just as much at fault. He had been searching Jack out, unable to keep the morbid from his system. It was a drug, something normal. The only thing that really, if he was deeply honest with himself, felt authentically real.

"As long as he doesn't involve you. You don't need that much conflict in your life." Molly's hand twisted with Will's, fingers intertwined with his. He glanced down at the grip, it feeling odd to have his fingers in this specific spaces. He was certain that his fingers had been... Encircled by larger, dangerous hands.

He quickly shook his head dismissing the ridiculous idea. "Molly, I have an odd question." Molly glanced up from her husband's shoulder and waited. "Have I ever been to Italy?"

Molly was quiet and Will couldn't help but note that it was a fraction longer than a normal silence.

"No," she replied. "Why? Were you wanting to go?"

"No," Will mused. "I just thought that..." Will trailed off and could see Molly bite her lip. Will frowned. Her tell. From the day he had met her, he knew her tell, knew when she was lying. But he didn't broach the subject. He let it go. "Never mind," he whispered, finishing off his wine and getting up. Izzy jumped up and followed him to the kitchen where he began to wash the glass. “I think I’m going to go fishing,” Will muttered as he set the glass aside to dry.

“Alright,” Molly whispered softly, finger trailing the rim of her glass. “Will, you know you can tell me anything you need to, right? I’m here for you.”

“I know,” Will answered with a small nod, hands taking the edge of the sink as he looked out the window at the snowy wasteland he was starting to grow tired of. It wasn’t quite as magical anymore, though he couldn’t exactly place who had made it magical. What, not who.

“And make sure you’re not out too late. I know you like to lose track of time, but we’re having Danny’s parents over for dinner.”

“That sounds a little dark, don’t you think?” Will said, the words slipping from his mouth before he had a chance to contemplate them. He wasn’t even sure where he had come up with that notion.

Maybe he had been far too focused on the Chesapeake Ripper for his own good. Will rubbed at his chin and sighed, not daring to see what Molly's expression was. "I'll be back before dinner."

"You never did get to teach me," a light voice said, pulling Will from his concentration.

Will tore his eyes from his pole and to the snowy river banks where Abigail was standing, in a pair of wader pants and a winter coat, long auburn hair pulled back into a ponytail. She stepped into the icy water and Will could feel her inhale from the temperature. Just because the waders made you dry that didn't mean that they kept out the cold. She came to stand beside Will, arms circled around herself to block out the chill.

"You're not real," he reminded absently, flicking his wrist to cast once more.

"It's winter," Abigail pointed out, looking around them at the icy that floated by and then up at the darkly greying clouds that were going to dump more snow in a few hours' time. "Don't fish sleep or something during the winter?"

Will felt a smile pull at his lips, scar giving a prickling twinge. "Fish don't hibernate."

Abigail gave him a dirty look and stuck out her tongue. "I know that," she grumbled. "But it's cold. Don't they do something?"

"Their metabolism slows down," Will explained, shrugging a bit. "They do not need to eat as much, so they are much harder to catch. Makes the reward all the sweeter."

"Will you teach me, dad?"

Will opened his mouth to argue, but found himself unable to. It was so routine now, so common, so easy, so natural to hear her call him that name. He couldn't fight her anymore. And it felt good, especially with how much Wally was ignoring him. Maybe this was his substitution for being pushed aside by his stepson.

"Come here," Will instructed, nodding his head at the girl. He held out his pole to her, letting her grasp it in pale hands. "Make sure your finger keeps hold of this line. Don't let it go." Once Abigail had a firm grip on the pole, Will stepped behind her to get on her other side. "Your father never taught you how?"

"You are my father and no," Abigail replied with a shrug. "He liked to hunt. But they're the same. One you stalk, the other you lure."

Will frowned in dislike at the comparison. He had never much cared for hunting. His father had made him learn, but he never had a stomach for pulling the trigger. "One you catch, the other you shoot," he corrected,

"And what are you trying to catch?" she asked, letting Will pull out more of the line for her.

Will was very quiet as he thought, an answer coming to his mind, though he was unsure where it had come from and what it meant. "The one who caught you." He caught Abigail reaching for the scar at her neck out of the corner of his eye, but he didn't acknowledge the movement.

"The one that got away," she said softly with a nod. "The one who keeps getting away."

“Catch a fish once and it gets away, it’s a lot harder to catch again.”

Rehearsed. That’s how the words felt coming out of his mouth. That’s how all of his actions felt now. Rehearsed, reused, repeated. Over and over and over again, *deja vu* seeped into every atom of his body, constantly wanting to be recognized, but pushed aside.

Will rested his hand on Abigail’s and they both shared a smile with a small laugh.

“Do you remember the one who got away?” she asked softly, her smile falling.

“That’s why I have to catch him.” Will gave a firm nod, unsure where the sentiment came from, but he believed it. He wasn’t sure what he was supposed to be remembering, but he would keep pushing until he did. Anything for Abigail, even if she didn’t exist... She was more than real to Will and that’s all that mattered.

“Last thing, before casting a line,” Will said, attention back on his teaching lesson, “name the bait on your hook after somebody you cherished.”

“To say goodbye?” Abigail questioned, looking up to meet Will’s gaze as he stepped back so that Abigail had enough room to cast.

“The person you name it after cherished you, as the superstition goes, you will catch the fish,” Will explained with a smile at the girl.

“And what did you name it?” Abigail questioned, pulling back the pole to cast the line.

“Hannibal.”

* * *

Hannibal winced as the scalpel pressed into his skin with a smokiness as it cut. Hannibal’s hands clutched to the sides of the table he was on, making sure he didn’t move. “Exploratory laparotomy?” he gasped out, closing his eyes tightly to stop the room from spinning. He was not new to pain, but with no drugs to help calm his mind, it wandered over every delicious step that was going to be taken and the marks that it would be leaving when Liam was finished.

“I should have asked you before we began,” Liam said with a faint smile to his voice. “Are there any medications that you are currently taking or do you have any allergies that I should know about?”

Hannibal gave a laugh, listening intently to the abdominal retractor being pulled apart. The metal was cold as it was placed against his skin to hold open the incision that was made. Bold and unrelenting. The pain threatened to blacken the edges of Hannibal’s vision, but he pushed through it, forcing his eyes to stay open, himself to stay conscious.

“Well, Dr. Lecter. It looks like you have an infection from getting shot, which is no surprise,” Liam stated, reaching a single finger inside of the monster. Hannibal tried to ignore the foreign object. “No black goo, though.” There was a dramatic sigh. “Such a disappointment.” There was the clanking of some more tools and Hannibal could feel it getting harder to keep his eyes open. “You have gastrointestinal bleeding as well. It’s going to be a bitch to clean up, but I’m sure I can manage.”

Liam straightened himself back up and looked over Hannibal's paling face with a small laugh. "You're not giving up on me yet, are you doctor?" Liam moved to where he already set up an IV drip for a blood transfusion. "We still haven't reached the best part yet."

"And which part would that be?" Hannibal asked, head tipping to the side to watch as Liam got the IV ready to push into Hannibal's arm. Liam taped it off and moved back to the open cavity in the killer.

"The part where I rearrange you."

Hannibal gave another weak laugh, hands feeling numb and fingers tingling. "Your brother was just as humorous," he muttered out as a pure, intense, and brilliant pain painted his torso, things that did not belong there being inserted, medical tools touching parts of him that never should have been touched. "He had planned a meal for each of my limbs."

"I doubt you would taste as sweet as you think you would," Liam countered, his voice dimmed in Hannibal's ears. There was a sharp slap to his face and his eyes opened, Hannibal certain that he hadn't given himself permission to close his eyes. "Stay with me Dr. Lecter. I want you to be present through this whole procedure. It's only fair after what you did to my brother. Not to mention, won't it be fun to see the inside of your knee after I'm done with your guts?"

"The utmost."

Will trudged his way back up to the house with both Abigail's and his own catch slung over his shoulder on the stringer. He crossed the street and stopped at a car he didn't recognize in the driveway. He paused for a moment before his eyes widened and he swore softly, hurrying up and into the house. He pushed open the front door and could hear pleasant chatter from three voices and yelling at a TV from two younger ones who were obviously playing video games.

He closed the door behind him and made his way into the house, entering the kitchen where Molly and two men stood, each with a glass of wine while Molly was checking whatever was cooking in the oven.

The taller of the two men had thick dark hair, broad shoulders and a muscled physique. Will could tell that he worked out religiously. Will felt like he kept himself in good enough shape, but this man was chiseled like a god. He was vain. Looks were the most important thing to him. Carefully kept beard, manicured nails. God, Will wished he didn't have to know, didn't see. He didn't like seeing the flaws.

The shorter of the two was a much smaller frame, maybe a swimmer. Lean with bright red hair that nearly reminded him of Freddie Lounds. Where had she been? He hadn't heard from her in a while. The man was a laborer, something in construction by the way his hands were calloused and cracking, not meant to hold a wine glass, while his friend screamed high class. Champagne and parties, beer and frozen pizza on lonely nights.

"Oh, you're back!" Molly said happily, closing the oven and going over to place a kiss to Will's cheek. "Dinner will be ready in a few minutes. Will, I'm sure you remember Jordan and Casey."

Will racked his brain for the names and faces, but there was nothing. No folder, no file, no book in his library. But there was a room. An oddly empty room in his mind. One where a person seemed to be missing.

“Jordan and Casey,” Will said with a smile and a nod. That room could be explored later. Right now he needed all of his attention to be a good host. “With the boat.” He closed his eyes as the words left his mouth and silently scolded himself. He knew better. He knew how normal people spoke, he just sometimes couldn’t make himself play the part.

The two men laughed lightly and Will opened his eyes to find smiles. “At least you seem to remember that,” the larger one said with a smile, a thick accent coating the words. European. He smelt at his wine before taking a sip, a motion that Will was certain he had watched someone perform before. Maybe they had met previously. “Your wife told us that you were in the hospital for a few days after being attacked.”

“FBI,” the other continued on with a slight southern drawl that was not unlike Will’s. One that was hidden away as best as it could be so he didn’t sound weird while being up north. “I guess it’s as dangerous as they make it out to be on the TV.”

“You have no idea,” Will answered softly. Molly gave his arm a squeeze and he glanced down at her.

“Why don’t you go take care of the fish and get changed and dinner should be ready by then,” she said with a guiding push.

Will gave a small nod, realizing he was still carrying all of his fishing gear and his catch. “I will be back in a few moments.”

“Do you hunt, Will?” the thick accent asked.

“I don’t have the stomach for it,” Will answered kindly, shifting the several fish on his shoulder where the stringer was beginning to dig into him.

“Shame,” he pressed on. “We have a lovely lodge and wonderful access to deer.”

“I problem solve,” Will explained. “Problem solving is hunting. It's a savage pleasure and we're born to it.” Will paused in his words, the quote repeating in his mind. They weren’t his words. They belonged to someone else. Who?

There was a silence around the room and Molly quickly picked everything back up. “Dear, go take care of the fish.”

Will gave a small nod and left the kitchen, heading back outside to his shed. He placed the fish onto the gutting table and closed his eyes with a deep sigh. Why was he so weird? Why couldn’t he just hold a normal conversation? Why couldn’t he just be normal? For once in his life, he just wanted to be... seen. Seen as himself. Not have to try to hide, not have to try to blend in, not have to wear his carefully made mask that had chips and cracks in it from years of weathering.

The funny thing was, was that Will was certain he had had that at one point or another. And maybe it had been Molly at one time, but not now. He felt like he had to keep his fort up around her now too. But somewhere in his past there was someone. Someone with a kind smile and a good ear for listening, a wicked tongue to play back with him. To tease and pull and push and prod. Eyes brave enough to see Will and Will brave enough to see back.

With fish cleaned and now in the freezer and hands washed clean of blood, Will made his way back into the house, hitting the stairs to change before Molly had a chance to spot him. He pulled on his more formal looking clothing, what he wore to teach, because he didn't own anything much nicer, and then went to the bathroom, taking a wet comb through his hair in an attempt to tame his curls as some semblance normalcy.

Will turned to leave the bathroom, hand reaching out for the light, but stopped between the doorway to the bathroom and his bedroom. He stared as a large black stage stepped around his bed, feathers covering his body in place of any fur.

"Garret Jacob Hobbs. FBI!"

Will winced, hand jumping to his head at a pulsing pain. He blinked several times and found himself alone once more. He clenched his teeth with a sharp inhale, trying to push the pain away and left the room. The ravenstag was just another manifestation from his mind. Another thing to add to Abigail, the seductive accented voice, and the wendigo that haunted his waking moments and his dreams. He just had to ignore it. It was all in his mind. God, he was crazy, wasn't he?

The name clung to his skin as he made his way down to his guests that he had never wanted. He would have pushed the name away if another voice had said it, but the fact that his own voice yelled it in his head, he couldn't hide it away. His own voice had given him the name. It had to mean something.

"What?" Will asked, looking up from his plate of food at a hand on his arm. His eyes flickered around the room to each person who was staring at him. His eyes dropped down to his plate of lasagna that he didn't remember plating for himself. The two younger boys laughed and quickly returned to their own conversation, Molly frowning. "I'm sorry. Can you say that again?"

"They wanted to know what you did for the FBI," Molly answered, fork cutting into the layers of pasta.

"This and that," Will replied, hurriedly eating a bite. He didn't want to get into it. He didn't like talking about himself. There was too much for people to take apart, too much that they wouldn't like. "Teach, mostly."

"Were you attacked by a student?" Casey, the redhead that now had a name somehow, asked curiously, eyes alight with the need to know.

"No," Will replied with a small shake of his head. He wasn't sure how he knew that was wrong when he couldn't even remember being attacked at all. "I was following a lead for a case."

"Which case?" Jordan, yes that one was Jordan, asked, just as curious as his husband.

Or Will just assumed they were married. They both had rings and they were obviously the guardians of Danny, a little red headed boy that had somehow befriended Wally. Not that Wally couldn't have friends... What was wrong with him tonight? He just wanted to be back at that river talking nonsense with Abigail. Stay hidden behind his metaphors.

"I was working on the Chesapeake Ripper," Will replied, taking another bite of his food, not enjoying the taste of it much anymore. It was missing something. The meat was wrong. Hamburger instead of sausage. But where had he ever eaten lasagna with ground sausage and not hamburger?

There was silence and Will pulled his eyes from his plate to see two stunned faces and Molly with a disappointed furrow in her brows, clearly not thinking this was a conversation for the dinner table.

“Did you find him then?” Casey asked excitedly with a smile. Will blinked, taken aback. “Who else would have attacked you? You’re so lucky he didn’t take any organs from you. You must have been close!”

There was a nervous, apologetic laugh from Jordan, his hand reaching out to take his husbands in a silent warning. “Forgive him,” Jordan said, a fake smile plastered on his lips. “My husband is into the macabre. He finds those types of things very interesting, but I am sure you see more than enough of it on a daily basis, Will. It’s probably something he doesn’t want to discuss over dinner.”

Will tipped his head to the side, looking over the two carefully, eyes narrowing. Something was familiar about them. Something he couldn't quite place, but he pushed it aside, sure it was the fact that he had met them before and just couldn’t remember. But that didn’t feel quite right. There was a knot in his chest.

“Russian?” Will asked, fork hand now propping up his chin, curious if the man would correct him or not.

“Polish,” Jordan replied.

Will gave a nod, eyes turning to Casey, focused on the bridge of his slightly crooked nose. “There is nothing wrong with enjoying the macabre. Finding comfort in death can be freeing. It is, after all, the only thing that creates us all equal in the end.”

Once more the words weren’t his. They belonged to someone else, but they slipped from his mouth so naturally. They were so easy to say, so easy to channel. Someone else he could play so he wasn’t himself. Someone well off, someone powerful, someone confident and very much in control.

There was a roaring laugh from Jordan that caused Will to jump. “It looks like you’ve found a friend, *ukochany*.”

Will tipped his head curiously at the endearment. There was something so familiar about the way it was said. Why was everything so foggy and familiar? Why couldn’t he wrap his head around what it was? It was going to be the death of him. It was driving him a little insane to sit here and watch these two and see himself as them. Or at least as Casey. He could never be Jordan, but he could imagine being Jordan. And maybe he was pulling from Jordan to keep himself strong, after all, that’s what he was good at.

“I know where I’ve seen you before,” Casey said, pulling Will from his thoughts. “Will Graham. I thought the name was familiar, you’re on Tattle-Crime. Weren’t you the one who they tried as being the Chesapeake Ripper?”

Will’s eyes widened and he found himself at a loss for words. His eyebrows furrowed as he saw Jordan frown, casting a dark look over at his husband. Molly coughed on her wine and wiped at her chin with her napkin.

“That’s enough,” Jordan ordered harshly.

“What?” Will breathed out, looking over to Molly.

She shook her head and rose to her feet. “I think that’s enough of that conversation,” she said, voice a little raspy from choking on her drink. “Is everyone ready for dessert?” She took her plate and quickly snatched up Will’s before he had the thought to say he wasn’t finished.

“Dessert!” the kids both said excitedly.

Will bit his tongue as the pulsing in his mind got worse. “I’m going to get some aspirin,” he announced, getting from the table and heading towards the bathroom. He closed the door behind him and searched the cabinet, pulling out the bottle and downing two of the small white pills.

“Let me tell you the story of a mild-mannered FBI instructor who was asked to create a psychological profile of a murderer,” a woman’s voice said, Marion Vega. “Garret Jacob Hobbs, the Minnesota Shrike, killed young women who looked just like his daughter. He killed them and he ate them.”

There was that name again. Hobbs. Abigail’s last name.

“Will Graham understood how Garret Jacob Hobbs thought, which is how he caught him. Shot Hobbs dead as he cut his daughter's throat. Will Graham saved Abigail Hobbs's life.”

That would explain the scar across the girl’s neck.

“But this profile he created of her father was so vivid, he couldn't escape it. In an unconscious state, he killed three more young women. Cassie Boyle.”

Will’s hands gripped the sink as his knees weakened at the sight of a young girl in the middle of a field, mounted on deer antlers, swarmed by crows.

“Marissa Schuur.”

There was a painful twinge in his temple at the flashing image of a young woman hung up on several pairs of deer antlers as if she were a coat on a coat rack.

“And Abigail Hobbs. Mr. Graham saved her from her father, but couldn't save her from himself. He killed her and ate her. At the very least, we know he ate her ear.”

Will’s stomach churned dangerously and he turned on the faucet, using his hand to suck down the cold water in an attempt to steady himself, but it didn’t ground him. His jaw tingled and saliva pooled in his mouth until he emptied his stomach into the sink.

His eyes widened as an ear tumbled from his lips, studded earring glittering wickedly in the fluorescent lights of the bathroom. Will stumbled back and away from the sink that was no longer running with water, but with thick blood. His fingers stretched out across the wall at his back as if that would help ground him.

“What he did with the rest of her is locked away in the recesses of Will Graham's traumatized mind, or so he would have you believe. Something else you should know about Will Graham. He's an eideteker. He has a remarkable visual memory. He is keenly insightful to the human condition and I would argue, the smartest person in this room. Capable of creating a psychological profile of a different kind of killer, one that would become his alibi.”

“Will, are you alright?” There was a knock at the bathroom door and Will blinked, catching a glimpse of himself in the mirror. His hair was stuck to his skin with sweat and his breathing was battered.

“Fine,” he choked out, a vile taste in his mouth. “Aspirin went down wrong.” It was a weak excuse, but he wasn’t sure what else to give Molly as an answer.

“Alright,” Molly said through the door. “Dessert is on the table.”

“I will be there in a moment,” Will assured, moving over to the sink that now was only running clear water and was empty. He turned off the faucet and grabbed a towel, wiping the sweat from his clammy, pale skin, breathing hard.

He left the bathroom and went for the stairs without a word, ignoring the looks that were given to him from the group at the table. He closed his bedroom door behind him and found where his laptop was on the bed. He opened it and quickly typed Tattle-crime.com into the search bar. It took a moment to load and Will starred as he was greeted with a large red exclamation mark and the words stating that the website had been blocked.

He gave a confused look and deleted the search, typing in the name Garret Jacob Hobbs. Blocked. Minnesota Shrike. Blocked. Cassie Boyle, Marissa Schuur. Blocked. Abigail Hobbs. Blocked.

“She just wants to protect you,” a gentle voice said behind Will. Will jumped as if he had been burned and looked up to find Abigail with her arms folded over her chest in a beautiful flowery dress. She liked dresses. “Don’t be mad at her.”

Will shook his head, licking at his lips. “You’re real.”

“Mostly,” she answered with a nod.

“You’re dead,” Will gasped out. “And I killed you, didn’t I?”

“No, Dad. You didn’t,” Abigail answered with a reassuring tone. “I told you, you were the one who tried to protect me.”

Will looked back at the computer screen and quickly typed in the name that had been plaguing him. The name he had called his lure without a reason as to why. Doctor Hannibal Lecter.

Blocked.

* * *

The right angle clamp was cold as it was used to pull open another scalpel cut that had been added to just below Hannibal’s knee and had momentarily had a finger digging into it. Hannibal’s eyes closed tightly at the strange sensation, something else in his body that shouldn’t be there.

“It looks like you’ve torn both your meniscus and your ACL,” Liam stated, eyes flickering up to the still surprisingly conscious Hannibal who was, at the moment, holding an ice pack to the staples that were in his stomach to keep the swelling down. Liam admired Dr. Lecter’s determination to stay awake and be mentally sound with no pain killers. Lecter was an unusual man and he could see what the late Mr. Verger liked about him, or more accurately, didn’t like about him. Hannibal shuddered as something was pushed into his leg and moved about, most likely a camera. “I can repair the meniscus, but I believe that we will have to split your hamstring for the ACL. You’ve done a number on it. It's shredded to pieces.”

“I did walk the good portion of 160 miles,” Hannibal whispered, voice having been faint for quite a while.

“That would do it,” Liam agreed with a nod of his head. “I will need your help on this one, Dr. Lecter. You’ll have to hold the scopes steady so that I can work. I, unfortunately, only have two hands.”

“You’re doing this microscopically?” Hannibal questioned curiously, hand reaching out to take the long handle on the scope that was in his knee, able to feel the change of grip deep inside of himself. “I thought you would have wanted to leave your mark on me, Dr. Jefferies.”

“I had my fun with your previous surgery. I am not as cruel as my brother,” he explained as he messed around with a few other tools that he had laid out at his workstation. “You will have a dashing scar down your center though. I made sure of that. Something to remember me by.”

Hannibal snorted, unable to find the strength to give a full laugh as the room spun dangerously. It had been hours. Hours of continuous pain that was no longer delicious like a glass of fine wine. It was annoying now. A fly that needed to be swatted. But Hannibal didn’t fight, didn’t ask for any relief. Trust was not something he gave freely and due to the personal connection he had with Liam, he wasn’t about to give it to the man.

“I wouldn’t have it any other way,” Hannibal muttered, mouth dry. Liam stepped around him, checking the IVs that he had going to make sure that they were still filled enough and administering exactly what Hannibal needed to stay awake.

“You are able to stand a great deal of pain, Dr. Lecter,” Liam commented as he went back to wipe at the blood on Hannibal’s leg to make sure he could see what he was working on. “How did you come about this?”

“I’ve always had a high tolerance,” Hannibal explained, head leaning back in the chair he was now in, eyes closing as he tried to keep his breathing steady, Liam’s fingers back at his knee. “I suspect it is due from my childhood and the trauma I experienced then. Regular exposure to painful stimuli can increase one's pain tolerance.”

“And were those stimuli forced upon you or self-inflicted?”

Hannibal felt a smile pull at his lips at a pull on something inside of his leg that he could sense all the way down to his foot, causing his toes to twitch. “More mental abuse than physical.” Hannibal’s teeth latched onto his lip at a searing sensation. “But a mixture of both if I am going to be honest with you.”

“How polite of you to humor me, Dr. Lecter.”

“It is a wise thing to be polite; consequently, it is a stupid thing to be rude.”

“To make enemies by unnecessary and willful incivility, is just as insane a proceeding as to set your house on fire,” Liam finished for Hannibal as the man trailed off. “Arthur Schopenhauer. Are you ever rude, Dr. Lecter?”

“I eat the rude.”

“And what of Will Graham?” Liam asked with no cautiousness to his voice whatsoever. “I have been informed he is quite rude when the time allows.”

“He is no more rude than I am God,” Hannibal defended, looking down at Liam with a frown. “His mind is different. He does not process or act in the same way as society would have him be. It is in no way his fault what slips from his mouth. It is not intentional. He never has ill intentions.”

“You speak very highly of him, Dr. Lecter.”

“I hold him very highly,” Hannibal agreed, letting his head rest back again, spots dancing across his vision as he held on a little longer. “I love beautiful things. Beautiful food, beautiful minds, beautiful people... I have been intrigued with both Will’s mind and beauty since the moment I met him, and in that moment I worshiped him immediately and have been unable to stop since.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again to my sister and my wonderful beta, @PitaGonzalezMe on twitter.

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

At the lake's edge stood Abigail, barefoot and in a flowing floral sundress, skipping rocks across the lake's surface. Hannibal watched with a faint smile as she picked up a rock, skipped it and then reached for another over and over again.

"She looks happy," Will muttered above Hannibal. Hannibal gave a small nod, closing his eyes, letting the sun sink into his pale skin. "We don't go out often enough. She doesn't deserve to be cooped up in that house all day."

Chapter Notes

Thanks again to my sister and my wonderful beta, @PitaGonzalezMe on twitter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

LOSING YOU
TERRIFIES ME

“Why don’t you boys go run and get ready for bed?” Molly suggested as she washed off the dishes to put into the dishwasher.

Danny, who was once again spending the night, and Wally raced up the stairs and once they had disappeared, Will felt trepidation fall over the room. He did his best to ignore the feeling as he brought the last of the dishes from dessert over to the counter for Molly to do.

“I’m going to let the dogs out,” Will announced as he left the room. He could hear Molly’s footsteps behind him, but he ignored them as he let the dogs out of their kennels where they had been put for the duration of the time the guests were here. He opened the back door and stepped out onto the deck, allowing the dogs to go down the stairs and out into the yard that was more muddy with slush than with snow from being tracked everywhere by the dogs. Molly was once more behind him and he felt his body tense up at the presence.

“Did you want to talk about dinner?” she asked.

“Not really, no,” Will answered, leaning against the railing, watching the dogs play in the snow that glittered in the moonlight. “They were nice, Danny is a good boy, that should be enough.”

“There’s really nothing you want to ask me or talk about?” Molly tried again, a hint of an apology in her voice that Will couldn’t help but push away.

He didn’t want an apology. He didn’t want to have to ask and beg for the truth from his wife. He wanted her to be honest with him outright. If she couldn’t be, then he really didn’t want to talk to her.

“No,” he said once more, *ssking* as several of the dogs started to fight. They quickly broke apart at the order.

“Will-”

“I would like to be alone,” Will stated firmly, head lowering onto his folded arms over the railing of the deck, breath warm on his forearms.

There wasn’t an answer, just footsteps fading into the house and a door closing behind him. This was all so fucked up. He didn’t know what to do, didn’t know what to think, wasn’t sure how to feel, the years upon years of others’ emotions washing over him and fighting for a voice.

“See?”

Will looked up at the voice, glancing around until he was met with piercing white eyes in a pale face that was darkened with black veins. Bullet wounds lined the man’s torso, decent shots, but not nearly accurate enough to take the man down quickly.

“See?” he asked again, voice low and airy.

Will stood fully upright and took a step back as the zombie-esque man took a shaky step forward, body unstable in its movement, but somehow staying upright. Will’s foot hit the edge of a shovel and he tumbled backwards, onto the snow covered deck, eyes wide as the man continued forward, unrelenting.

“See?” he demanded.

“See what?” Will asked, breathing hard as he scrambled through the snow to get back to his feet. “What am I supposed to see?”

“See?”

“Will?” Jack asked curiously as he entered Will’s empty classroom. The light had been on and the door open, as if it were an invitation.

Will sat at his desk, head in his hands, not looking up at his name. He was breathing hard, shoulders rising and falling with the effort. Jack gave a curious look and stepped closer, hand resting on the desk that was littered with files and pictures. Pictures that Jack knew all too well.

“Will?” he asked again. The man jumped with a large inhale and blinked, eyes slowly focusing on Jack. “You don’t have a class today, what are you doing here?”

“Can’t be at home,” he replied brokenly, still not fully present, eyes haunted and dancing around the room as if he were searching for something. “Molly won’t tell me anything.”

“Where did you get these files, Will?” Jack questioned, holding back the anger that was rising in his chest. Will was going to get them both in trouble.

“I stole them from your office.” Will’s face turned sour with a frown. “They should make better locks if these are official case files and not yet fully made public.”

“When did you go-” Jack broke off with a deep sigh, Will echoing his words. “When I went to make copies-”

“-You went to make copies.”

Will got to his feet, rubbing at his face with both hands, before sitting partly on the desk, arms folded over his chest. Jack couldn’t help but notice the way that Will’s shirt was rolled up to his elbows in much the same way as Hannibal would wear it.

“This is the first case we worked together,” Will stated, pointing at all of the files over the desk. Jack gave a small nod. “This is the very first case I helped you solve.” Another small nod was Will’s answer as if he needed the reassurance once more. “I don’t remember it Jack.” His voice shook as he said the words. “I don’t remember any of it.” His hand went up and rubbed at his jaw, trembling. He gave a forced laugh. “Did I...” He swallowed with a loud clicking sound in his throat. “Did I kill these girls?”

“No,” Jack answered and Will gave a sigh of relief, shoulders visibly relaxing. That one word held more truth in it than what Will had been able to hear over the last week or so. More honesty than Molly or Walter had shone him. More honesty than his phone calls with Alana and Margot. More honesty than anyone who was alive, right there beside Abigail, who Will had thought was all in his mind until that morning when he found her file. “You did not kill any of these girls.”

“I don’t remember Jack,” Will repeated once more. “None of it. I don’t remember solving this case, I don’t remember shooting Garret Jacob Hobbs, I don’t remember saving Abigail, I don’t remember going on trial and spending nearly a year in a mental hospital.” Will got to his feet, clearly upset and on edge. “I don’t remember a single report that I made. Not one single damn word written on these pages. I don’t remember any of it and that terrifies me.”

Will sunk back into his chair, and Jack watched once more as this man that had been through so much cracked under the pressure again. Will wiped at the silent tears that were falling down his cheeks and Jack gave a sigh.

“It might come back,” he offered. “The doctors were certain it would eventually.”

“I don’t know if I want it to come back,” Will admitted. “My head has been pleasantly empty until I read all of this. I should have listened to Molly. I should have just let it all go.”

“That’s not how you operate Will,” Jack said, glancing around the room for another chair and finding one, went over to grab it. He pulled it up to the desk and took a seat, winter coat over the back of the chair. “You dig until you know every last detail. That’s one of the reasons you’re so good at your job.”

Will shook his head in disagreement. “I’m cursed,” he corrected. “My abilities have never been a gift. I wish they were gone.”

“No you don’t,” Jack argued easily with a small shrug. “You said so yourself. You were saving lives. You saved people, Will.”

“Not her,” Will shot back, pulling up a picture of Cassie Boyle and throwing it back onto the desktop over all of the other files. “Not her.” He repeated the motion with Marissa Schuur’s picture. “Not her.” Georgia Madchen. “And definitely not her.” Abigail's picture was placed on top of the stack, throat slit on Hannibal’s kitchen floor, icy blue eyes incredibly blank in their stare upward.

Jack stared for a moment longer at the picture, concluding that Will really truly didn’t remember. He had been skeptical, but if Will had to sneak into his office and steal case files of cases that he had been so deeply invested, then there was something horribly wrong inside of Will’s head.

“I am torn Jack,” Will continued, voice soft. “I don’t want these blank spaces in my head anymore. I know that I am missing so much, and all of it is so incredibly important, desperately important, but at the same time, I don’t want any of these memories back. I don’t want to be able to live through them again and again and again, because I know that’s what I would do if I had them back. They would consume me.”

Jack was at a loss for words. What was he meant to say to that? It was like when he had found out that his wife had cancer. What does one say in a situation like that? Well, that sucks. Better roll of the dice in the next life, I guess.

Jack sighed loudly through his nose and Will pulled his eyes from the pictures on his desk to see a conflicted man. One that looked to be fighting with what he wanted to say and what he should say. A man who was choosing to be silent so he didn’t ruin anything further than it was already ruined.

“Jack, how could I forget all of this?” Will asked, trying to take the pressure off of Jack to answer his previous statements. “I remember that Beverly passed, but how could I forget that it was the Ripper that got her? How could I forget that, according to reports, she was coming to me while I was in that mental hospital, having me help her solve cases? How can I forget that I sailed across the world to go to Italy to find the Ripper? How do I fucking not remember going to Italy? I think I would remember going to Italy!”

"Do you remember the Ripper?" Jack asked gently.

Will gave a confused look, head tipped to the side. "As in his cases? Yes. I can recall, apparently only most, of his cases to mind with a horridly surprising clarity considering all of the other things that I've forgotten."

Jack shook his head. "No, that's not what I meant. You found the Ripper, Will. That's who attacked you before you ended up in the hospital," Jack explained, watching as Will's eyes seemed to widen at the information given to him. "Do you remember anything about him?"

Will shook his head absently, clearly lost back in thought. He closed his eyes and Jack waited patiently for the man. Anything to find Hannibal, that's what Jack would take. Anything at all that Will could give him. "Just the profile I gave you," Will finally answered, voice thick. "I don't recall having ever met the Ripper."

Jack looked disappointed but gave a gentle nod. "I think it is time for us to move past this case." Jack motioned to the desk. "It is a past that I think you will be better off forgetting." Before Will could argue, Jack got to his feet and picked up his coat. "Please return those to my office when you are finished with them." Jack gave a small bow of his head to dismiss himself and left the room and Will staring after him, wishing he understood what Jack meant.

"Recovery time for both would normally be around four to six weeks," Liam explained to both Margot and Alana who stood a good amount of space away from the bed they had placed Hannibal in. His skin was still sickly pale and he was still attached to an IV and a heart monitor, but he was fast asleep. "But because we did both at once, which is also not very ethical, it might take a little longer. He should not eat anything until his bowel movements are normal. It will mess with the work I did in his intestines. Water will be fine."

"And once he's back on his feet?" Margot asked with a hint of disapproval in her voice, arms folded over her chest as she stared daggers at the man.

"He won't be for quite a while," Liam continued to explain. "I will return soon to help with his physical therapy for his knee. The strength will need to be built back up in it. He will need to be on crutches for at least a month with no weight on that knee. And then it will probably take a good month or two more for him to have full range back in it and be able to go back to his normal activities."

"He's not going to stay here that long," Alana muttered. "He will want to move on. He doesn't trust us enough to not turn him in."

"He doesn't have a choice," Liam said with a small smile. "When he wakes, will you make sure that he gets up? I have placed a set of crutches by his bedside. He needs to be walking around every few hours. It'll help prevent blood clots. Don't expect him to go far though. Maybe once or twice around this room and then back into bed. Sleep is the best thing for him now."

Liam picked up his bags of tools and headed for the door, Margot and Alana following him as he continued his instructions. "If there is any inflammation to either area or if he starts to develop a high fever you need to call me. There's something wrong in that case. I will most likely need to operate again. He currently still has one, but..."

The door closed behind the three of them and Hannibal opened his eyes, reveling in the silence that seemed to cradle at his aching limbs. A constant, mind bending pain pulsed through every inch of his body, the only relief being the ice that he held against himself.

Each breath he took hurt and found himself wanting to hold his breath until he started to go horribly dizzy before letting himself breathe in hopes that it would dull the pain, but it only made it worse.

Instead he tried to search internally, trying to find someplace in his mind palace that overlapped with Will's, a comfort in the thought that they could be together, that Will would be waiting for him.

A small smile came to his lips at the idea of Will racing to his battered, beaten and broken body as he had when Hannibal had fallen into the river. The way that Will jumped into action when the situation demanded it. Will was able to push away his insecurities and mental deficiencies and work when it was needed most. It was how he saved Abigail. It was how he had saved himself from Randall Tier after Hannibal had set the killer on him. It was how Will had taken down The Great Red Dragon in a beautiful waltz.

Will would take care of him. Will was that type of man. An embodiment of everything good and evil and trying so utterly hard to be good. It was attractive, the fight that Will put up daily. Some days he was more tired than others, some days nearly giving up, but picking himself back up to keep fighting. He was beautiful in his gentleness and alluring in his darkness. A blurring of the light and dark that Hannibal didn't mind.

Will's fingers were kind as they felt out the new stitches and staples that filled Hannibal's body, skilled with needing a soft hand to fashion lures and tie delicate knots in fishing lines. There was a welcome burn that came from each touch, but Hannibal didn't mind it. The burn was from Will and Will was always welcome to burn him.

Fingers threaded through his hair, pulling at it softly, voice dim and far away, though Hannibal was sure it was teasing him about how grey his hair was getting with his age. About how Will liked the longer length just as Hannibal enjoyed Will's longer curls.

The harshness of winter was gone, the warmth of sun against his skin, head held in Will's lap as they lay on a hill, overlooking a lake. Will's fingers played with Hannibal's hair, the other hand splayed out on Hannibal's chest, feeling each and every breath Hannibal took, making sure he was still breathing and not holding his breath to delay a pain response.

At the lake's edge stood Abigail, barefoot and in a flowing floral sundress, skipping rocks across the lake's surface. Hannibal watched with a faint smile as she picked up a rock, skipped it and then reached for another over and over again.

"She looks happy," Will muttered above Hannibal. Hannibal gave a small nod, closing his eyes, letting the sun sink into his pale skin. "We don't go out often enough. She doesn't deserve to be cooped up in that house all day."

"She has the gardens to play in with Izzy," Hannibal offered, a tiredness slipping over him, relaxing his body further into Will's comforting grasp. "You know why we can't let her out. We're far too recognizable to grace the public without ending up in tabloids and behind bars."

"Murder Husbands," Will said in disgust, causing Hannibal to smile.

“Mrs. Lounds does have a way with words,” Hannibal agreed, giving a fake sound of pain when Will pulled at his hair. “You can’t be upset when it’s the truth.”

“Careful, Dr. Lecter. I might find myself husbandless if you keep this up,” Will warned, eyes firm set out on Abigail who was wading into the lake, the small waves licking at the hem of her dress. “Maybe we should move again. Let her see something else.”

“We have no reason to leave. We haven’t made ourselves noticeable yet.”

“She’s restless,” Will defended, hand rubbing odd patterns and shapes into Hannibal’s chest comfortingly.

“She is, or you are?” Hannibal corrected. Will gave another tug at his hair and he chuckled. “You can go explore. Our property is expansive. I bought it for a reason.”

“Me being the reason?”

“You are always the reason, *mylimasis*.”

“Hannibal?” a voice called, causing Hannibal to look up to where Abigail was coming up to the hill, probably for something to eat. “Hannibal?”

Summer was ripped away from him viciously and he was greeted with snow blowing outside of an open window. Outlined was a woman’s body, leaning over the bed. “Hannibal,” the voice said once more. “Jefferies said that you needed to try to walk around the room.” It was Alana. The last person that Hannibal truly wanted to see, but was grateful it was her and not Jack Crawford. “I’m sorry I woke you.”

“It is a necessary evil,” Hannibal answered, mouth dry. He held out his hand and Alana slowly helped him sit up. He groaned, arm holding around his middle as if his insides wanted to spill out. Alana helped him to his feet and Hannibal did his best to keep himself upright as he was handed the crutches. He was grateful for the objects to put his weight on and he let Alana guide him around the room slowly, one hand pulling along his IV drip, the other ready to steady him if he needed it. “How long was I asleep?”

“A few hours is all,” Alana replied. “It looks like your recovery-”

“I am well aware what my recovery looks like, Alana,” Hannibal interrupted, a dull ache already forming under his arms from the pressure of where his weight met the crutches. “And I am grateful to you for the help you are showing me.”

“We didn’t do this for you,” Alana amended coldly. Hannibal paused in his barely moving steps and glanced over at the woman who looked worn from stress. His eyebrows rose and Alana rolled her eyes, nearly hearing his voice egg her on. “We did this for Will.”

“Will has no further need of me. Why help me?”

Hannibal began his rickety movements and Alana barely took a single step to catch up with him. “He is never more himself than he is with you,” Alana replied. “You’re good for each other. You balance one another.”

“I pull him from his insecurities and he reigns me in?” Hannibal asked, trying to slowly turn back around. The room was beginning to spin and he wanted to be back in bed.

“Something like that,” Alana agreed with a small nod, hand reaching out for one of Hannibal’s elbows to stabilize him as he turned back around.

“How is he?”

Alana blinked several times, trying to decide if she should tell Hannibal the truth or not. He already knew that Will didn’t remember him, Alana doubted she could make the pain he was feeling any worse. Alana could tell that it wasn’t just the physical that had Hannibal put out. He wasn’t Hannibal without Will by his side. He couldn’t rule his court without his queen to support him, not anymore.

“He’s well,” Alana finally decided on. “He is back teaching.”

Hannibal gave a small smile, thinking back to the class that he had entered in the middle of based on Jack’s request. A class that Will was teaching all about him. A class that Will was spouting compliments about his work almost as if he knew the killer was in the room with them. Compliments that Hannibal had to try very hard to keep down and hidden under his mask despite wanting to smile with sharp teeth.

“He’s a good teacher. I found his classes fairly entertaining and intellectual. And the dog?”

“Molly was taking care of it the last time I heard. I haven’t visited him since the hospital,” Alana explained, pace maddeningly slow. “Molly was very adamant that Jack and I don’t bother him during his recovery.”

The crutch slipped on the slick floor and Hannibal tumbled forward. Alana quickly caught him and hoisted him back upright, Hannibal’s teeth gritted in pain with a sharp inhale. “I’ve got you,” Alana assured, taking on Hannibal’s weight fully as she lowered him back to the bed that they were gratefully close to.

“Thank you,” he got out with bated breath. Alana helped the man lie back down on the bed and she gave a nod in answer, hands going to her hips with a deep breath. She turned to leave the room, determined to only give Hannibal the bare minimum care that she could when he called her name. “Can you please do me a favor?”

Alana licked her lips as she turned back to the bed that was cast in a soft glow from a lamp. “What would that be, Hannibal? Favors are never easy for you.”

“Please check on Will for me. Tell me how he is. I worry about him.”

“Please?” Alana asked curiously. She could count on one hand the amount of times that Hannibal had said please to her. Only when he desperately wanted something would he use the word, politeness be damned. “Hannibal, how badly do you want this?”

“Please.”

“This winter seems never ending, doesn't it?” Alana asked as she sat down in the small café booth with a tall coffee that was warming her frozen fingers.

Will exhaled deeply as he sat down across from her, his own coffee in his hand. He pulled his beanie from his head, his curls wild underneath the hat. His glasses were then removed and placed on the table top, letting his blue eyes shine.

“I would love to see grass again,” Will agreed softly, blowing at his coffee before taking a sip of the liquid that was still far too molten for his body, but he appreciated the burn, reminding him that he was alive and this was all real. “You’ve never once asked me to get coffee with you before. I’ve never been asked to get coffee by anyone before.”

“Well, I just thought that it would be a nice change of pace from everything,” Alana answered with a shrug, taking a sip of her own drink and pushing it away at a burn against her lips, still too hot. “And we haven’t spoken in a while.”

“We haven’t spoken since I woke up in the hospital,” Will corrected, the same sort of hostility in his tone that had been there ever since Alana had defended Hannibal. She wasn’t sure if Will could remember their relationship after she had been pushed from the window, but it didn’t matter. He subconsciously was still upset with her. “So why reach out now?”

“I was in town,” Alana said with a nod. “We were looking at maybe moving back down here. I was checking out houses.”

“Without Margot?” Will tipped his head to the side curiously, like one of his many stray dogs and Alana gave a small smile at the familiarity of it all. “You two have been very inseparable since meeting.”

“She is my wife, Will,” Alana reminded, curious just how much he really did remember. He could remember Margot, but not Hannibal when it was due to Hannibal that they had met. “You and Molly hardly separate either, unless Jack calls you away for a case. Has he done that recently?”

Will blinked several times at the sharp change in subject. “No,” Will stated firmly. “Is this what this is about?”

“What?” Alana asked in confusion.

“You want to make sure that Jack doesn't break me again?”

Alana shook her head. Will was always so quick to shut down, so quick to jump to conclusions. “I just wanted to get coffee and talk. Normal people things.”

“I’m not exactly the right person to be doing normal people things with, Alana.”

Alana smiled and took another drink of her coffee, the temperature much more manageable. “Then this should be fun, shouldn’t it?” she asked back cheekily, causing Will’s eyes to narrow on her suspiciously. “I’m not a practicing psychiatrist anymore Will. I just want to talk. No profile, no brain picking, no games, just friends having coffee.”

“Then what is your burning question, Alana Bloom? What could a mind with no longer a professional curiosity about me want to know?” Will’s fingers traced the patterns in the geometric tabletop, eyes not looking at Alana in the slightest, utterly concentrated on the square his fingers had found.

“I would like to know how you’ve been Will,” Alana answered sweetly. Will glanced up for a fleeting moment before his eyes went back to his shapes. “How are the dogs? How’s Molly and Walter? How is work? Tell me how you have been.”

Will was silent for a moment or two and Alana could see him weighing all of the answers out in his mind before he picked and chose extremely carefully what he would let come out of his mouth.

“The dogs are good. Izzy still doesn’t like anyone but me. She growls anytime Molly tries to come near her,” Will finally responded, eyes still firmly set on a triangle now. Will caught Alana’s nod and tried not to read further into it than he had. It was almost as if she understood what he meant as if she knew why Izzy didn’t like Molly, but Will didn’t say a word. “Molly and Walter are...” he exhaled deeply, hurt in the breath. “Closed off.” He sucked his lips into his mouth and licked at them for a moment in thought. “Walter doesn't want to be around me and Molly keeps a wall up between my work and my past and her. I feel like I’ve interrupted their family and I’m no longer welcomed.”

Alana was quiet, listening to the broken man speak, wishing there was some way that she could tell him everything, every last detail, to wash away any pain and doubt. She wanted Will to know that, as twisted as the man was, like a corkscrew sort of twisted, there was someone out there that loved Will, cared for Will and would not abandon him. Someone just out of memory’s reach.

And as much as she wanted to say Hannibal had broken his promise, Hannibal had kept it full heartedly. That promise that he had made her before being escorted out of his cell. A promise to keep Will Graham safe. And Hannibal had. He had not abandoned Will, not in the way that Alana had. He had not given up on Will, he had simply put Will in the position that Will needed to be to keep him safe and medically sound. And hadn’t that been everyone’s goal since the very beginning? To keep Will Graham medically safe and sound?

“I’m sorry,” she said softly. “That must be hard.”

“It’s infuriating,” Will answered, blinking hard, the words sharp on his tongue. “And I don’t even know what I possibly did or said to hurt them. I don’t know how to fix it. I’m just walking on glass hoping that I don’t slice open my foot. I don’t know how much longer I can do that.”

“Maybe you just need to let things settle down a bit more?” Alana offered, unsure of what else to say to comfort the man. Will was difficult to read and even more difficult to try and pull from a gutter when he fell into it. Everything had to be said and picked carefully.

“It’s been two weeks, Alana. I don’t think the house can settle any further into the foundation without the cracks becoming worse.” Will took another sip of his drink and looked out at the swirling snow and people trudging through it, wrapped jackets and scarfs right around their bodies in hope of finding some semblance of heat. “You know...” he whispered, breath fogging up the glass. “I have this dream nearly every night, a dream where...” he paused, a hand reaching out to wipe at the glass only to have it fog up again. “I’m drinking expensive wine in front of an enormous fireplace and there’s a voice there that reads me stories in languages that I don’t know. And it’s...”

Will stopped, turning back to the table, picking up his coffee to signal the end of the thought, not wanting to finish it. Alana gave a small nod, listening, unable to do anything else. How was she supposed to tell him that it was real? How was she supposed to tell him that Hannibal, the Ripper, who was currently recovering from two major surgeries in her home in Harrisburg, two hours away, was the man who read to him in the firelight?

“Have you tried talking to Molly?” Alana asked, the only logical thing that she could force from her mouth without screaming from the rooftops that Hannibal was sick in a bed within driving distance. Hannibal was delicious with lack of sleep because he was afraid of the nightmares awaiting him. Hannibal was refusing any pain medication and living every day as a mass of hurt. Hannibal needed Will just as much as Will needed Hannibal. That Hannibal always kept his promises and each day he was getting better was another day closer to her own demise.

“She shuts down or blocks me out or deflects the conversations,” Will explained, jaw tight. “And just the other night we were having dinner with one of Wally’s friend’s parents and they mentioned that I had been tried for the Chesapeake Ripper’s murders.”

Alana froze at the words, concern flooding her face. “You didn’t remember the trial?” she asked softly.

Will gave a huff of laughter and shook his head. “I still don’t remember the trial.” He shook his head. “And Molly offered to talk and when I brought it up later, she wouldn’t speak to me. And I tried searching for information on the case. Tattle-Crimes, Garret Jacob Hobbs, the Minnesota Shrike.” Will’s hand lightly hit the table each time he said a name. “They were blocked. All of my searches in regards to that case are parental blocked and I don’t have the code, in my own house.”

The anger radiating off the man was hot and deep. Frustration and hurt and Alana wanted to hug him in an attempt to sooth him. He just wanted to know about himself. That was all Will had ever wanted, just to understand himself and have someone else understand him and Molly was denying him that. Alana knew Will well enough to know that Will didn’t leave well enough alone.

“Do you remember any of it?” Alana questioned gently.

Will shook his head and rubbed at the back of his neck with a loud exhale. “I read all of the case files that Jack had on it, but I don’t remember any of it. Nothing. It’s all blank. I just know what I’ve read from a piece of paper. Reports, pictures, court documents. I’ve read everything, every last little thing I can and there’s nothing there.”

“Maybe you just need to let it go?”

Will laughed, head thrown back, shocking Alana. “Why is this the first thing that you and Jack have agreed on?” He finished off his coffee in one last large swig, setting the cup aside and folding his arms on the table. “I can’t let it go Alana. There are five years missing, five years of my life that I have no idea what happened. Five years just gone.”

“You obviously remember some of it.” Alana gave a single shoulder shrug. “You remember Margot and Molly and Walter.”

“I don’t remember how I met Margot though,” Will grumbled. “I just seemed to know that she was married to you and that you have a son. I don’t even remember his name.”

“Morgan,” Alana supplied with a small smile, seeing Will’s face relax slightly with a smile of his own, obviously grateful that more information wasn’t being hidden away from him.

“Morgan,” he repeated softly, tasting the name on his tongue carefully. “How old is he now?”

“Nearly four.”

Will’s smile grew and he gave a small nod, head returning to look out of the window. “Thank you Alana.”

“For what?” Alana asked curiously.

“Not lying to me.”

“Well?” Hannibal asked as Alana entered the room, closely followed by Margot.

Alana glanced over the man who was sitting up in bed, boredly picking at a thread in the quilt that covered him. Alana couldn’t help but feel smug at the fact that Hannibal was reduced to not being able to do anything. Only his mind for company, nothing else there to distract him. Each and every minute there for Hannibal to feel.

There was a flash of threatening eyes as Hannibal looked up, wanting the silence to be filled, but Alana simply folded her arms over her chest with pursed lips. They stared at each other for a long moment before his gaze softened, obviously recognizing that the position he was in was not one where he could demand things handed to him on a silver platter.

“How is Will Graham?” he asked, voice much calmer, hands now folded in his lap.

Margot was silent as Alana stepped up to the bed and sat on the edge of it. Margot was well aware of the leverage that her wife held over Hannibal. Margot had been working hard to make sure that they stayed as the upper hand. Anything to help her make sure that Hannibal’s promise was null and void, especially after all of the shit that both her and Alana had gone through for the men in this world. That’s why they had picked each other. They were a safe haven in a world that was fucked up and used them as it wanted and Margot wasn’t about to let that be stripped away from her.

“He doesn't know it, but missing you,” Alana answered, finally filling the silence. Margot smirked at the next few hours that would be playing out, something that Alana had simply suggested and it made Margot laugh for once in a very long time. Something torturously fun, something that Hannibal deserved. “Molly is taking good care of him and the dog is perfectly happy.”

Alana rose from the bed and Margot delighted in the wide eyed confusion that was over Hannibal’s face. “That’s all?” he asked breathlessly. Margot had to hide a laugh at the twitch in the corner of one of Hannibal’s eyes. “That’s all I get?”

Alana tipped her head back and forth in mock thought and shrugged. “For now. Motivation to get out of bed. Come to the table for lunch today and I will think about letting you know more.”

Hannibal frowned at the thought of being strung along, but he gave a small nod. He knew it was the only way he was going to get any information out of the two of them. He just had to play their game until he was healed and then the rules would be bent back in his favor. They were always in his favor at the end. He was the one who wrote the rules and it didn’t do well for others to believe that they could. Oh, he would let them win for a moment or two, just to see what they would do, but he was the puppet master and if they didn’t dance for him just so, the stings were cut.

He watched as Alana and Margot left his room and he closed his eyes with a deep and steadying breath. He needed to get up anyways. He still needed to walk, well hop, about to keep his blood circulating correctly and he wasn’t sure if he could stand being alone in this room any longer with nothing to do. There was only so long that his dreams could keep him pleasant enough company, and his mind could only imagine so far. Imagining was not the same as living, the details nowhere near as vivid and Hannibal wanted to live rather than imagine.

With more practiced hands, Hannibal gathered his crutches and pushed himself up from the bed, straightening his clothes before hobbling himself from the bedroom and towards the dining room. Morgan ran past him once, both dogs following after him, barking as they went.

Hannibal watched them go and disappear around a corner before he pushed open the doors to the dining room. He glanced around the room that had been shrouded in darkness the last time he had entered it, delusional with fever.

The room was overly large, something to show off how much money Margot had. Three people didn't have a need for such a space. Hannibal was one to indulge, but even this he found as ridiculous.

The table was of white marble, spanning the full length of the room, a good football pitch in length. The chairs were white armchairs with cushioned seats, studded and buttoned, hand carved designs around the head of each one.

Down the middle of the table were several vases of flowers, fake, much to Hannibal's dislike, but he was sure they would have been filled with breathing flowers if the time of year allowed.

The floor was slick porcelain tile, also in that same medical white. The same white that covered the walls and the chandelier that hung over the table. Hannibal was about to take a seat to wait for Alana and Margot who would, he hoped, eventually show up, when the door opened.

"You can just wait in here," Margot's voice said as Hannibal attempted to turn around. "I will see if I can track down Morgan and the dogs. Don't mind Uncle Allister. He's just visiting."

The door closed and before Hannibal could get all the way around, the crutch slipped out from under him. Strong hands gripped at his arms and pushed him upright, helping him straighten out until Hannibal was staring into a pair of tempera blue eyes, large brush strokes of concern through the blue hues of sky.

"Are you alright?" Will's voice asked, dancing in Hannibal's ears like a concerto.

For one of the very few times in his life, Hannibal couldn't speak. It was like all intelligent connection to language had evaporated form his mind and his mouth hung open with only silence coming out. His heart pounded in his chest as he took in this cruel joke that Alana and Margot had played on him. A joke that made his insides squirm and his mouth go dry.

"This floor isn't exactly the best thing for crutches, is it?" Will continued on, unbothered by Hannibal's lack in answer. "Let's get you to a chair." Will's strong hands guided Hannibal into the first chair at the table and Will took the crutches, leaning them against the edge of the marble. "I hope I didn't startle you."

"N-No," Hannibal finally got out, clearing his throat. Will gave a kind half smile and tilted his head slightly. "Not at all." Hannibal watched as Will's nose scrunched up.

"You sound familiar," he whispered softly, only deepening the pain in Hannibal's chest. "Do I know you from somewhere?"

He doesn't remember.

Hannibal quickly placed his mask back on, hiding away any hurt before it had a chance to manifest himself across his features. “I’m afraid not,” Hannibal clarified, closing his eyes with a deep breath, mask cracking slightly. How unfair. “As Margot said, I’m just visiting for a time. Better medical practices here than my country.”

“And where is that?” Will asked curiously, pulling a chair around the other side of the table to sit next to Hannibal. “I can’t exactly place your accent.”

“Lithuania,” Hannibal found himself saying, the truth being the only things that could come out. Hannibal watched as Will’s eyes searched him from top to bottom, carefully calculating and storing away any information that he could find. “And Louisiana?”

The small smile that had been hovering over Will’s lips dropped and he leaned away from Hannibal quickly, but didn’t move his chair in fear of being rude to the older man. “How did you know?”

“You try to hide it,” the man that Margot had called Allister explained simply, as if Will were as easy to read as everyone else was to Will. “But you can pick it out on some of your vowels.”

Will gave a nod in understanding, unsure why he couldn’t look away from the man before him. His hair was long and dark with silver through it, most likely blond when the man was younger. He had a slight cut hidden beneath his bangs, the bruising a mustard yellow that dipped a bit lower than his hairline.

He was thin, thinner that what Will felt like should have been his normal weight. But he was on crutches and had obviously just had medical treatment of some kind. It would make sense if the man wasn’t eating nearly enough as his body tried to heal itself.

He wore a simple sweater and sleep pants, though Will had the odd feeling that the man normally sported a suite and tie. Something in striking colors and weird patterns, mostly paisley. And that voice, Will couldn’t place it, but he knew it from somewhere. Recognized it, though it was faded. As if it were from a dream, or a dream of a dream.

“Do you not like eye contact?” Allister questioned, a faint familiarity to the words.

“Eyes are distracting,” Will answered, fingers tapping on the table. “You see too much. You don’t see enough. It’s hard to focus when you’re thinking those whites are really white, or they must have hepatitis, or is that a burst vein?” Will’s eyes jumped up to meet a curious maroon gaze, his mouth going dry, words mere whispers as they left his lips. “So I try to avoid eyes whenever possible.”

Familiar and foggy...

Will jumped as the spell was broken and the door to the rather impressive dining room opened. Alana and Margot stood at the doorway as Morgan ran in, the two dogs behind him. Hannibal watched as Will’s eyes lit up and he reached out to scratch at Winston’s head.

“Hey boy,” Will said happily, pulling at Hannibal’s heart. “Have you been good? I’ve missed you.” Winston jumped up and licked at Will’s face, causing the man to laugh as he leaned away from the dog. “Down, Winston,” he commanded, the dog immediately obeying. “Thank you for watching him.” Will’s smile was bright as he reached down to pet the other dog now as well. “Are you sure I can take them back?”

“He’s yours,” Morgan quickly said. “Applesauce, come on.” The lighter dog barked and followed Morgan from the room, Will keeping a firm grip on Winston so the dog didn’t follow.

“I hope Uncle Allister wasn’t too much of a bother,” Margot said, Will catching a hint of sarcasm in her voice.

Will’s eyes flickered over to the man who was watching him intently. “Not at all.” Will rose to his feet, clicking his tongue to get Winston’s attention. “Heel,” he ordered softly. Winston stood at his side, following closely as Will walked over to Alana and Margot to give them hugs. “Thank you so much. I wasn’t sure where he had gone.”

“Molly just needed some help while you were in the hospital,” Alana said with a grin and a small shrug in answer. “It was no problem. Give Molly our regards.”

“I will.” Will gave a nod and went for the door. He stopped as the man spoke once more.

“*Prašau prisiminti mane, gudrus berniukas.*”

Will blinked a few times, the words catching him off guard. He glanced back over his shoulder for a moment and licked his lips, confusion over his face. He shook his head and gave Margot and Alana another smile before leaving the room, accompanied by Alana to show him out.

Once the door closed, Hannibal released a deep breath and sunk back in his chair, despair washing over and completely through him before he could stop it. He licked at his teeth for a moment and gave a laugh.

“Which one of you thought up that plan?” he asked.

“Alana was hoping it would help him remember,” Margot replied, arms folded and her steps lazy as she approached the table. “She thought that if he did then we could get you out of our home, away from our son. But I thought that this was rather amusing as it was.”

“I bet it was riveting to watch,” Hannibal agreed, tongue playing with one of his sharp canines.

“What are you going to do, Dr. Lecter? Is there anything to live for if Will Graham does not remember you?”

Hannibal’s eyes drifted over to the flowers in the vases, flickering over them until they landed on a small blue flower. “Forget Me Nots. Interesting.”

Chapter End Notes

mylimasis-precious

Prašau prisimink mane, gudrus berniukas- Please remember me, cunning boy

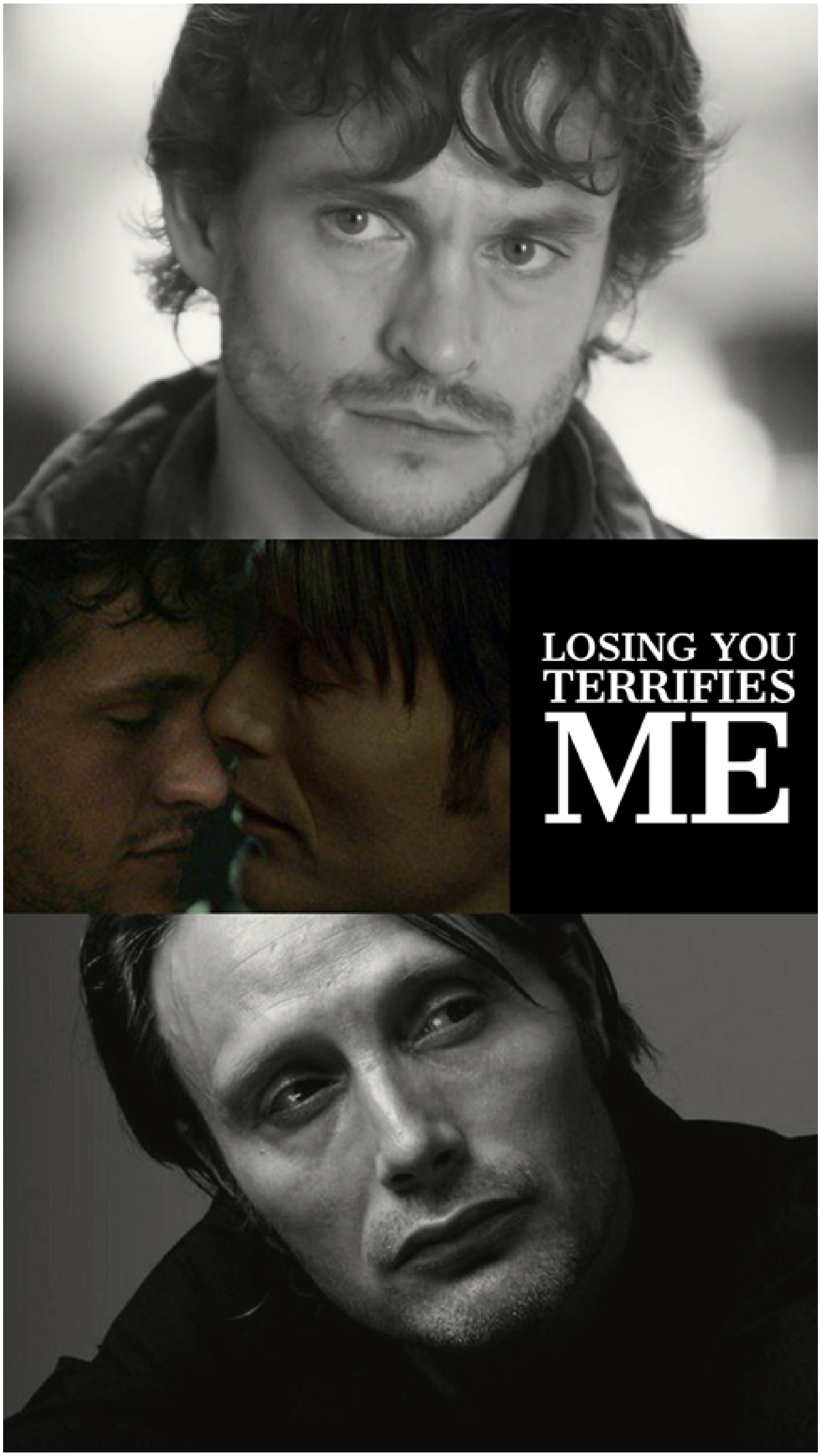
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

> “If either of you moves, I will kill the youngest!” Will shouted, causing Mrs. Carson to flinch, tears running down her cheeks.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes


LOSING YOU
TERRIFIES
ME

His hands were held firmly above his head, a hot mouth at his neck. This same man that haunted his dreams, all of his returned memories, biting at his delicate flesh. Will still couldn't see him, *didn't know his face, but he smelt of old books and wine and spices, with a hint of coppery blood rusted over. It was dizzying.*

And Will knew he was dangerous. Will knew that under the skin there was a monster trying to claw its way through and to Will to devour him, but Will couldn't bring himself to mind. Not when he was being pushed into a wall as soft as goose feathers. Not when this man's tongue got him drunk on wine. Not when the heat from his naked body warmed Will's winter frozen heart.

"Make love to me..."

Will gasped, eyes fluttering open, looking around the room. It was early, the first rays of morning barely able to penetrate the curtains. Will closed his eyes with a shaky breath, trying to push away the feeling of his erection tight against his boxers.

He wanted to turn over and go back to sleep, but the phantom feeling of hands on his skin kept him bobbing near the surface of consciousness until Will finally got annoyed enough to get up.

He glanced over his wife's sleeping form for a moment, an odd feeling of guilt washing over him at the dream he didn't consciously pick to have. With a frown, he moved to the bathroom and turned on the shower, letting the steam fill the room.

Will could still feel everything, just as if it had happened. Kisses to swollen lips, a hungry tongue against his pulse that Will somehow had the feeling was trying to decide whether to silence the beating or not, fingers burning his skin with each and every touch.

"Our minds are very good at recording our senses and relaying them back to us."

Will groaned and stepped into the hot water, hoping that it would help sooth his skin, hide the burning from hands with burning from a downpour of rain. But it only heightened the feeling.

Will closed his eyes, trying to push the dream away, but it kept swimming in front of his vision, his own voice begging for love from a man. A man without a face. A man with long, artistic fingers and strong dangerous hands. A man with an accent that was protective.

Will's fingers reached down, taking his length in his hand and pumping it slightly, teeth biting lips so he would stay silent at the relief that flooded through him.

"Our minds are very good at recording our senses and relaying them back to us."

Was it a dream? It felt so real. His dreams always felt so real, but this one was different. There was no haze to it, just straightforward emotions. He wasn't sure what was real anymore and what wasn't. All of it twisted and turned and he struggled to find a time where he had been with a man.

He never had, as far as he was aware, although there might have been that one time in college. But that was a drunken kiss, if it really happened at all. There were a lot of things that Will realized he couldn't quite recall in his life, most laced with alcohol despite how much he hated when his father drank.

"All of your attention must always be on me."

Will couldn't stop the moan escaping his lips as the order was said in his ear, so very real. Hands pushed him against the shower wall, caressing him as he continued to work at himself with a steady hand.

"This is all about you. Don't think about anything but how this feels. Do you understand?"

Will nodded in answer to the voice, head against the cold tile of the shower, breathing hard.

"I promise to be gentle with you. Taigi švelnus."

Will felt a shiver rack down his spine at the odd language, knees going weak as his muscles fluttered. The same sensation he had felt the day before when that man had spoken to him. The accent was familiar and welcoming, his hands now on Will's body, voice in his ear, silvering hair against Will's cheek.

"Hannibal," Will breathed out, coil tight in his gut. He wasn't sure where he had pulled the name from or how he knew it belonged to the man, but it did. He wasn't an Allister. He was a Hannibal. And Will knew him from somewhere, from something.

Foggy and familiar...

"Don't think about what's outside of this room," Hannibal whispered against Will's ear, carefully replacing Will's hand with his own. "Don't think about tomorrow." Will gasped, fingers snatching at shower tile. "Or a week from now." Moans, breath from Will's lungs clinging to the heat of the room. "Just be here with me now, *Mano mylimasis*." Will's knees buckled under him and Hannibal's strong arms kept him upright, lips at his neck, tongue licking away the water from the shower that was beginning to go cold. "Think about me."

That's all I can think about, Hannibal.

"Think about how much I love you."

I love you, Hannibal.

"Let go, Will," Hannibal instructed in his ear.

Nails dug red marks deeply into Will's palms as he came, using the shower wall for support as his body shook.

"Don't forget this Will. I couldn't bear it."

Will did his best to steady his breathing as the cold water clawed at his flesh, making him shiver. He washed off with trembling hands and climbed from the shower, a towel going around his waist.

His hands took the sink and he leaned against it with weak legs, eyes closed, cursing himself. What was wrong with him? Why was he having fantasies of a man, a man he didn't know nonetheless, and jacking off to him while his wife was in the other room? He was pathetic, disgusting. It was like he was back in high school.

That seemed like forever ago now, not that he remembered much of it. He chose to push those memories away. He had always been good at that. He still had them of course, filed away to be viewed at a later date, but he didn't often go to them.

It was odd that he could recall exactly, word for word, what Jessica Farthing had told him when he asked her to the dance one year, but he couldn't remember the Abigail Hobbs case that had made his career and really his whole life jump into the fast lane.

His mind was incredibly empty when we searched through the last five years. Scraps of burnt pages, ripped from notebooks, shreds of information but that was it. Whole filing cabinets completely empty, whole libraries lost like Alexandria.

With a deep breath, Will left the bathroom, the sun now pouring through the curtains a little more. He got dressed quietly to not wake Molly and went downstairs to start a pot of coffee and let the dogs out.

The morning was cold and he shivered as his wet hair dripped down the collar of his shirt. His breath was suspended in the air, his mug steaming. The dogs raced about the yard happily, Winston and Izzy becoming extremely close the moment that Will had introduced Winston. It seemed like they were the two odd ones out, but they didn't seem to mind. It made Will smile slightly.

"Can I have a sip?" a voice asked from beside him. He glanced over to see Abigail in her summer dress, skin blue from the cold. He held out his cup to her and she took a drink, not at all minding the temperature the drink was at.

"Are you old enough to drink that?" Will questioned, taking the mug back from her, clutching it tightly in his shivering fingers to keep them warm.

"I'm 19 dad. I've been drinking coffee for years."

Will grinned at the comment and took a drink himself, eyes watching the blood orange haze of the sun start to strip away the lazy purple color on the clouds. "You never wear anything warm."

"It's always summer for me," Abigail said with a small nod. "Because that's how I want it. I miss going to the lake and hiking. Summer was my favorite. My dad didn't ask me to find girls for him. It was... simpler."

"I'll take you to the lake," Will offered. He had slipped into this role so easily, given into anything Abigail wanted. He liked being called dad. He was Will to Walter now and it made him feel alienated, like he didn't belong anymore. "Once it's warm, we'll go."

"And fish?"

"If that is what you would like to do," Will answered with a nod.

There was a comfortable silence between them as Abigail took his mug from his hand to take another sip. A smile came to his face once more with a small laugh, just enjoying the quiet of the moment. But the guilt didn't stay away for long. The guilt of replacing his son, someone he had tried really hard to get to know when he had first started dating Molly. He had worked so hard to be the person that they needed in their lives and he couldn't help but wonder if it was really him or a modge podge of all of the personalities he had collected over the years, pieced together to be perfect for them. Maybe that's why they were so distant now. He wasn't that papier mache doll anymore. Maybe this was really him.

He was crazy and delusional and preferred to spend time with the dead and fake people in his mind more than he did his own family. He liked talking to Abigail far more than his own wife and Will desperately wanted to know if this really was how Abigail was like or if he was just placing all of the things he wanted in a child onto her, making her the perfect little puppet for him to take care of because his life wasn't good enough.

"Abigail, am I a bad father?"

"No?" she answered in question, setting the mug down on the railing. "You're better than my other dads, though both of them were kind in their own regards until they weren't. You were always kind to me."

"And what about to my real family?" he questioned softly, picking up a piece of ice and throwing it off of the deck.

"You have walls in place. All of you do. You just don't want to be hurt again." Abigail gave a small smile on her purple lips. "You're not a bad father, Will. But maybe take some time with them. Let me rest for a while. I'll always be here when you come back, if you decide to come back. They need you more than I do."

Will gave a small nod. "I need to do something for them," he agreed.

"Take them out this weekend," Abigail suggested with a shrug, letting Will take back his coffee to finish it off. "Maybe somewhere warmer?"

Will chuckled. "I don't have the money to do something warmer. But maybe we can go out to dinner. Just the three of us. Molly said she wanted to go to that new restaurant."

"And I will wait with jealousy for your return," Abigail said with a bright smile, freckles dusted a light pink in the rising sun.

"Will, I need a favor," Jack said, allowing Will's last class leave before asking for any type of help. "Can you look at a case?"

"A scene or case files?" Will asked as he picked up his things. This didn't feel out of place. Not as of late. Normal, one of the few things that was. Jack asked for help and Will gave an opinion without sinking too far in, just as Molly wanted. And what Molly didn't know wouldn't hurt her. Will was ready for the normal answer, but he found himself frozen at the word that Jack offered.

"Scene."

Will glanced over his shoulder to see Jack standing with hands in his coat, ready to go at whatever Will's word was going to be. "Jack," he said softly, turning around with a shake of his head. "We agreed that I would only look at the case files."

"I know," Jack said with a nod. "And believe me when I say that I would be more than happy to let you look at the case files if I thought that was going to help. I need you there. I need you to see it."

"Why?" Will asked softly, pulling off his glasses so he didn't have to make eye contact with the man. "Why do I need to be there?"

"I wouldn't ask you to be there if I didn't need you to be there."

Will's hands shook as they hung his glasses from the first button of his shirt. He rubbed at his eyes. "What happened?"

"There's been a string of murders happening for the last few months. Nine bodies. We just got asked to consult on the case. Apparently it's a little too much for locals to handle," Jack explained. "It'll be messy."

"It's always messy with you Jack," Will shot back, shoving the rest of his things into his bag as he thought about his answer. "If I say no, what will you do?"

"Accept your no. I can go find someone else to consult if absolutely needed."

"But I am the best." Will was given a nod in answer and he inhaled deeply. What Molly didn't know wouldn't hurt her. But what Will did know would haunt him. He knew he was in for a rough night if he went. "And if I say yes?"

"The team is already at the scene processing it. They are simply waiting for you."

"Back in the saddle?" Will asked with a fake smile.

"This time you should know which way you're facing," Jack agreed with a nod.

"Will this open a door that I can't close?"

Jack gave a shrug. "You can always say no."

Will shook his head and threw his bag over his shoulder. "Let's go Jack. I have dinner reservations to make."

* * *

The house was large, in a well to do neighborhood. Gated. The only way in or out was to live here or to be on an exclusive guest list that the guard at the gate only had access to. ID was required to get in if one was a guest and they had to verify which family and address they would be visiting before they were allowed through the gate.

Will stared up at the house that had to have been a dozen of his put together. All of the houses looked like a dozen of his house combined, but only this one was swarmed with police lines and agents going in and out of the house.

"Mr. and Mrs. James Carson," Jack explained as they made their long walk up the gravel driveway and to a fountain that was probably the size of Will's very unattractive Volvo station wagon. "Their oldest daughter came home to find her family. She was spending the night at a friend's house."

"Has she made a statement yet?" Will asked as Jack held up the yellow tape for Will to duck under.

"She is currently still undergoing medical follow up," Jack answered, stepping under the line himself. "She is in shock."

"Can't say I blame her," Will muttered, eyes following the trail of blood that started on the front steps. He paused, eyeing it carefully. It was made from something swinging, A hand at someone's side possibly. No. The spots were controlled. A knife maybe. "And the murder weapon?"

"A knife found further down the driveway. It's already been bagged and tagged."

“Any fingerprints?”

“No.”

Will gave a small nod and looked up at the large open front door where people in FBI jackets with cameras were moving in and out of. He wanted nothing with what was on the other side of that doorway, but he felt responsible, just like he had before, to help. He just had to keep telling himself that he was saving lives.

“I can drop you back off at the school, Will,” Jack offered carefully. “You do not have to go in there.”

Without a word, Will stepped into the doorway and onto a marble floor, ceiling tall with chandeliers dangling down from them. There was a rather expensive looking table in the center of the entrance with a large vase of flowers that reminded Will of Alana’s home. A double spiral staircase that led to the same landing sat just behind the flowers, though all of it seemed untouched and still stark white just as designed.

The interruption was the flicking of blood dropped from the knife. Will followed the trail behind the staircase to where the kitchen was, ignoring Jack’s orders to leave the house. When he entered the kitchen, he stopped, blinking several times to take in the scene, the sticky feeling of blood trying to drown him.

Across the island were who Will assumed were Mr. and Mrs. James Carson. They were unrecognizable. Their heads were crushed, a tossed aside frying pan looking like what had been used to accomplish the task. Their clothes were saturated with blood from what looked like multiple stab wounds. No restraints though.

“I’ll be back in a few minutes,” Jack muttered. “Let me know if you need anything.”

Will gave a small nod, stepping carefully around the blood on the floor around the island until he found three children, the youngest no older than 8 or 9 and the oldest maybe 14. All three were bound and tied together, heads leaning against each other’s shoulders in a circle counterclockwise, though Will couldn’t outright see what had caused the children’s deaths, simply that each child had a band aid in the middle of their foreheads.

With a deep breath Will closed his eyes, pendulum swinging once, twice, three times. Blood gathered itself up off of the floor, returning to the bodies from where it had been ceremoniously stolen.

The children, no longer bound, played in the other room, the sound of their cheeriness giving the home a rather light feel before the storm struck. Mrs. Carson was getting ready to start dinner and Mr. Carson was at the counter reading a newspaper.

The doorbell rang and Will opened his eyes to find himself back on the front porch, watching as the heavy wooden front door was pulled open and Mr. Carson stood with a smile.

“You expected me. You welcome me in,” Will said, stepping into the front room of the house, following Mr. Carson past the stairs and into the kitchen. “You know me. You do not need to be shocked by my presence. I was invited for dinner.”

Will watched with a pleasant smile as light chatter was exchanged between the husband and wife, then attention was turned to Will.

“We converse lightly, though I do not like you. I have been planning this for a while. Since the day we met. You are self-righteous and look down on others. Your morals are far superior to even mine, though you pretend to tolerate me.”

Will moved around the counter, finger trailing along the granite until he reached the knife block, pulling free a large knife. Will glanced over the knife curiously.

“How do I subdue you?” he asked curiously, looking towards the direction of the children’s voices. “There are five of you and one of me. I am intimidating, you are taking my threat seriously, but Mr. Cason can stop me if he wants to. He works out daily. His haircut suggests that he is or was once military of some sort. What makes you obey my order?”

Will glanced up at the children being filtered into the kitchen as well, each sitting down in a circle. Will tipped his head to the side curiously, the answer finally coming to him. “I am not alone. My partner rounds up the children and ties them, using them as leverage. My partner would have a gun. I prefer using my hands.”

Will stepped forward, knife held out motioning to Mr. Cason to get onto the counter. He obeys followed by Mrs. Carson.

“I do not bind them,” Will continued on, circling the island, looking at his two victims. “If either of you moves, I will kill the youngest!” Will shouted, causing Mrs. Carson to flinch, tears running down her cheeks. “My partner tosses me my bag and from it I pull candles and sage for cleansing. These are witches after all. Practicing dark magic over people who are below them. Mrs. Carson is a whore, Mr. Carson a conman. They did not earn what they have, they cursed their way into it. Let those without sins cast the first stone.”

Will went to work, opening a container of salt and spreading a circle all the way around the island. “This will protect us from the demons that leave their possessed bodies.” The candles are lit next, and then the sage, blowing it out and letting it smoke, a distinct light aromatic smell filling the kitchen. “With my partner and I now protected, I begin my ritual. I stab Mr. Carson thirteen times in the chest. Mrs. Carson screams, but the distance between the homes will make it nearly impossible for her to be heard.”

Will’s stabbing was quickly interrupted by hands clutching his wrists, nails digging into his skin, drawing blood out with them. Mrs. Carson held tightly to Will’s arms, fighting with him for the knife while Mr. Carson bled out on the counter.

“There is a gunshot and cries from the children,” Will hissed out through clenched teeth as he fought with Mrs. Carson. “My partner follows through on our threat, the youngest one slumped over. But Mrs. Carson does not stop fighting. My partner hits her over the head with a frying pan, effectively knocking her out.”

Will tried to catch his breath as he tossed the knife aside for the time being, taking the frying pan from the other’s hand and using it to smash in the woman’s head until she was unrecognizable. He went to the husband next, dealing him the same fate.

The frying pan dropped from Will’s hand and he gasped from the exertion.

"My ritual is not done, simply interrupted," he said, picking up the knife once more. "I also stab Mrs. Carson 13 times in the chest, though her heart has long stopped beating."

Will pulled the knife free from the wife's chest and turned to find the last two children whimpering and scared. "What do I do with the children? The sins of the parents do not belong to the children. I want them dead, but my partner is kinder than I am. He doesn't like to kill the children, though I know that there can be no witnesses. I take the gun from my partner and shoot the children in the head, mercy killings. They did not deserve the same fate as their parents, but it is unfortunate that if I want this work to continue, then we must not leave a single soul behind."

The gun went off, jumping in Will's hand, the last two children slumping over as well.

"I am satisfied. My partner is not. He is upset. It's annoying at times, but I understand. He begs to position the children so that they are supporting each other through the afterlife. I allow this. I allow him to place bandages to their wounds. Not to hide them, but as a comfort for the children. An apology for having to save them from a cruel world."

A hand clasped Will's shoulder and Will jumped, shaking as he was pulled from the scene that was threatening to trap him in it forever, his only lifeline being Jack's firm hold on him. He was breathing hard and his hands shook as he pulled his glasses off.

"What are we looking at?" Jack asked cautiously.

"Can I have some water?" Will asked thickly, voice rough. Jack's grip stayed on him, pulling him from the kitchen and back outside where he ordered someone to find something for Will to drink. Will sat down in the frosty, brown grass, cross legged, head in his hands until a water bottle was handed to him and he downed nearly all of it.

"Will?" Jack pushed, voice stern but more gentle than normal.

"It's a couple," Will gasped out, drinking more water haphazardly, wiping at what spilt down his chin. "Two men. One larger, athletic, one smaller. Umm..." He rubbed at his pounding temples. "One gathers up the children, the other takes care of the parents. It's a ceremony of sorts. Something religious. It might be in their heads or maybe it's a small group, I'm not sure."

"And what is this religion?"

"They believed that the Carson's were witches, possessed by spirits. Their money, their accomplishments and their children were not theirs. They were morally high and looked down at anyone else. Looked down on these two men, didn't see them as equals."

Jack chewed on his cheek, looking back at the house. "Continue."

"They burn candles and sage. You could smell it in the kitchen, very strong around the island. There will also be a circle of salt around the island under all of the blood to make sure that the evil spirits didn't escape into the world."

"They were each stabbed 13 times."

"The number 13 has many connotations," Will supplied, shaking out his hands that were suddenly feeling numb. "It's imperfect after the perfect number 12, Judas was the 13th apostle and betrayed Jesus, Loki was the 13th God, there are 13 members in a witch's coven..." Will trailed off at that.

“They’re not going to be done until they reach 13 families. Only at 13 will the world be cleansed of the witches.”

“So we’re looking at three more possible attacks. And what of the children?” Jack asked with a nod, noting down everything that Will had said.

“There’s remorse in the killings of the children. The children didn’t suffer,” Will explained, licking at his lips, wishing he had more water. “They were killed quickly and painlessly because of the partner. The one who did the stabbing enjoys the work. He doesn’t bind the victims because he likes the challenge. He likes the idea of using the children against the parents. The other killer doesn't approve of this, but believes too heavily in these people being evil that he is willing to overlook the brutalness of the other murders as long as he can care for the children.”

“He feels bad for killing the children?”

Will tipped his head side to side, words escaping him. “Uh, uh...” He shook out his hands again. “The children are innocent. They are just in the way. They will tell what they saw and they can’t risk being caught until they reach their 13th. He apologized to the children by positioning them in certain ways, as a close support system for the next life. He places bandages over the bullet wounds to take care of them, showing them that they were loved in the end. They might have a child of their own. Or at least the second killer does. He compares the children to his own.”

“Alright,” Jack nodded. “I can take you back to the academy now, Will.”

“There will be defensive wounds,” Will pressed on, causing Jack to fall silent once more. “Check Mrs. Carson’s nails for any DNA. She fought with the killers. That’s why her face was smashed in. They others weren’t like that, were they?”

Jack shook his head. “As far as my knowledge goes none of the other victims had their heads turned to pulp.”

Will frowned at the term, his mouth tasting sour. “Check the bandages for finger prints,” Will offered. “I doubt there will be any, especially since there were not bloody footprints left in the kitchen, though I’m not sure how they managed that. There also wasn't signs of a forced entry. Maybe ask the older daughter if the family was expecting guests.”

Jack held out his hand and Will took it to be pulled to his feet and led, with another firm grip on his shoulder, past Zeller and Price who nodded at him, and towards Jack’s car. The ride was silent back through the neighborhood until they reached the gate and Will perked up, sitting straight in his seat.

“How did they get in Jack?” Will asked softly, watching as the gate opened and Jack pulled out of the neighborhood.

“They could have been invited in. Even you said they were expected.” Jack offered with a shrug. “I don’t see why it matters.”

“Turn around Jack,” Will ordered, turning in his seat to look back at the gate.

“Will,” Jack sighed, pulling over to the side of the road.

Will jumped from the car and ran back up the road until he reached the guard house, panting. He knocked on the window and a dark skinned man with a mustache opened up the little window.

“I-I’m with the FBI,” Will stated, hands on his hips as he breathed, listening to Jack’s far off tires come back up the road. “I need to see the guest log for last night.”

“There weren’t any guests that came in last night,” the guard answered, handing over the clipboard to Will anyways.

Will’s eyes scanned the names, looking for anything out of place, flipping to the next page and the next, several days back. No guests. Will handed the list back through the open window with a small thank you, and turned back to Jack’s waiting car, hand over his mouth as he went. He climbed back in and was met with an expectant look.

“There haven’t been any guests. And you already checked the security footage, didn’t you?”

“Price said that no one jumped the fence, no one broke in, there were no issues with any of the cameras either,” Jack answered, pulling away from the gated residence.

“Then they live there Jack. Or they used to live there and the guard that was on duty let them in. I would suggest checking door to door and checking people who have moved away within the last few months. Maybe a month or two before the first murder began.”

Will parked his car and jogged to the sidewalk where Molly and Walter were waiting. He gave an apologetic smile and placed a kiss to Molly’s cheek. “I am so sorry I’m late,” he said, a little winded. “I got held up at work.”

“Jack?” Molly questioned, pulling Walter with her to the door.

“Do you have to ask?” Will held the door open for his family to pass through before stepping out of the cold himself.

The restaurant smelt of warmth and ginger, something oriental that Molly had wanted to try. Will didn’t find that he enjoyed that type of food much, but Abigail had been adamant about taking Molly somewhere she would love and Abigail was in his own mind, so it was really his idea.

They were seated and waters were brought out to them, Will crunching on his ice to try to block out some of the extra stimulation of being out in public. “How was school today?” Will asked, eyes on Walter, but not meeting his son’s gaze. How twisted was that? He could meet a stranger’s gaze and think about sex with him but he couldn’t even meet his own son’s gaze.

“Fine,” Walter replied boredly, playing with the paper of his straw, crunching it up and then straightening it out again.

“How was math? Isn’t that one of your fav-”

“Fine,” Walter replied again with a sigh.

Will’s eyes went to Molly curiously and she simply brushed Walter’s long hair from his eyes only to have the locks fall back down, unnoticed by the boy. She wasn’t going to help him on this and

Will was almost certain it was a test on his part. It burnt a bit, the question that was hanging in the air around them.

Do you deserve my son?

“Wally,” Will said once more, finally meeting the boy’s brown eyes. Will tried his best to ignore the inky pools, but they drug him down so quickly, showing him secrets that weren’t his to know. Walter had gotten hit in school, Will determined. There was a faint bruising on his cheek, hidden by his hair. Someone had made fun of the fishing lure box that Will had let him take for show and tell a day or so ago that he hadn’t seen since, now curious as to where it had gone. “Wally, I’m not mad at you,” Will said softly. “What happened to my lures?”

Walter sat up a little straighter, eyes shining with curiosity. “How do you do that?” he asked, arms folded over the table. “Can you teach me?”

Will felt a blush cover his cheeks. He had never seen someone that excited about his gift before. He wasn’t exactly sure what to say to the kid who was once more looking at him like a hero instead of a weirdo like the rest of the world did.

“I don’t know if it’s something I can teach,” Will ventured, nervous his words would hurt the child, but he didn’t sink back in his chair so Will pressed once more. “What happened to my lure box, Wally?”

“It broke,” Walter whispered, eyes lowering back to the tabletop. “A kid knocked it from my hand. Said it was lame that I liked fishing with my dad.”

“Where is it?”

“It’s in my locker. The lures are ok, it’s just the box. I was afraid you would be mad with me.”

“It was an accident, Wally,” Will assured, reaching out to pat the kid’s hand, sure that that was something that people were supposed to do to comfort someone. He was sure that someone had done it for him before as well, though no specific example was making itself known. “I’ll take a look at it tomorrow after school and see what we can do about fixing them.”

“Alright,” Walter said with a nod, tossing his scrunched up paper aside on the table.

Will grabbed his straw with a small smile. “I’m going to teach you something that my dad taught me,” Will said softly, leaning over the table so that Walter could hear him better. Don’t smash the straw against the table or the paper will tear. You just want to pull off the end of one side, and...” Will did as he explained and put the now opened side of the straw in his mouth, blowing. The paper flew off the end of the straw and flew across the restaurant, causing Walter to grin and Will to chuckle until it hit someone in the back of the head.

Molly smiled and hid in her water as Will’s smile dropped and he quickly looked away, Walter snickering behind his hands. The person the paper had hit turned in their chair and Will wanted to hide as he saw the person stand come over to their table. The straw wrapper was placed in front of Will and he winced.

“I’m so sorry,” he said quickly, not wanting to look up.

“That’s quite alright,” an accent answered, calling Will’s attention.

“Jordan,” Molly said happily. “So sorry.”

“Nothing broken,” the man assured, hand resting on their table. “I didn’t think we’d be seeing you again so soon.”

“Wally!’ Danny’s voice called as the boy leaned over the side of his chair and waved. Walter looked over to Will who nodded his permission and the boy raced off to Danny’s table, where Casey was wearing a smile.

Will’s eyes landed on Jordan’s hand, unsure of where else to look and the conversation around him grew muffled as he located several scratch marks just barely showing at the edge of his suit cuff.

Will jumped, his glasses nearly flying off his face as a strong hand slapped his back and Jordan gave a laugh. “We will have to do that sometime, won’t we Will?”

“Y-Yeah,” Will stuttered out, unsure of what he had agreed to do with this other family, but he was sure it was something that he would later regret. “Jordan, where did you get those scratches? They look a little painful.” Will grimaced as Molly kicked at his shin under the table, but Jordan only smiled, slowly pulling his cuff back down to hide away the marks.

“The cat thought I looked a little tasty today, I’m afraid,” Jordan answered coolly.

Molly gave a small laugh, obviously uncomfortable with the situation and trying to catch Will’s gaze to tell him to stop talking, but Will missed it.

“Your suit is immaculately kept for owning a cat.”

“No wonder the FBI likes you,” Jordan said with a tense smile. “So observant.” Jordan gave a sigh. “I do not wear suits around the house due to such an issue. That cat would tear them apart like a scratching post if I let her anywhere near them.”

“I can never wear anything nice with all of the dogs,” Molly threw out, nudging Will under the table this time instead of kicking at him.

“Jordan,” Casey called, standing from the table.

Jordan gave a nod and a smile. “I think I have a check to pay. Lovely to see you again.” He gave a nod and turned around, heading back to his own table.

Will stared carefully after him, mind working a million miles a minute, placing pieces together in the giant puzzle that Jack had pulled him into.

“What is your problem?” Molly asked softly across the table, her voice nearly lost in the chatter from the other occupants.

“There is a case,” Will answered honestly. “The latest victim fought back, scratched whoever attacked her. Happened last night. Those scratches looked new, still red and slightly swollen.”

“Will, you know how puffy animal scratches get. It was just their cat.”

“But what if it wasn’t?” Will asked back, not able to pull himself away from the way his thoughts were spiraling down.

“Danny’s parents are not serial killers,” Molly hissed. “And when did you start working a case?”

“It’s for my class. I’ve been keeping an eye on it. The ideology is intriguing.”

“They are not killers Will. Not everyone you meet is a murderer.”

“Do you remember what happened the last time no one believed me?” Will demanded, voice a bit louder than he meant it. He really had meant for this night to be nice, a way of connecting, of trying to tear down the fort walls between them, but he was only succeeding in building them higher. “I was locked away for being insane and then nearly died when I was finally able to prove I was right.”

Molly stared at him in shock and Will felt his own face relaxing curiously, his breathing rapid, a hand going to his head at a shockingly electric pain. Will lowered his head into his hands with a deep exhale, trying to dispel the pain.

The cells were dark and cold. The jumpsuit fabric was itchy against Will’s skin. The bed left his back aching without anything but used metal springs for support. No blanket, no pillow in case he decided he wanted to kill himself, though there was a sink. It would be easy enough to bash his head against, and maybe he would if Beverly Katz wasn’t there to hold him in place.

He was just as insane as everyone was saying he was, or at least he was starting to believe it. Dr. Chilton was doing a masterful job at breaking him down slowly. He reminded Will a great deal of Dr. Lecter.

Who was Dr. Lecter again? He sounded important. No matter.

Where was he? Bashing his head in.

Somedays that sounded like the best thing for him. End the headaches, end the starving himself because all he could only see was Abigail's ear each time he ate, end the mindless torture he put himself through trying to think of any small detail he missed that maybe could have saved him. Anything, there had to be something. The evidence pointed towards him, all of it did, gift wrapped and given to the FBI like a birthday present.

What could he have said or done differently? What could have made them see? What could have saved him? Because no one was going to save him. Not now. He had to save himself. He had to-

“Dad?”

Will looked up, fingers pressed against his temple. Walter was sitting back in his chair and Will inhaled deeply as the boy motioned to a waitress who was waiting for his order. “I’ll have the same as my wife,” he answered softly, afraid that if he said anything louder it would split the seam in his brain and all of his thoughts would come spilling out onto the table for the room to see and judge.

“Are you alright?”

Will gave the kid a gentle smile, scar pulling painfully. “Just a headache. I’m fine.” Will took a long sip of his water and sighed. “Tell me about math class. What are you learning now?”

“Couldn’t sleep?” a small voice asked somewhere behind Hannibal.

Hannibal glanced over his shoulder to find Morgan entering the kitchen. The boy was smart for his age, but Hannibal had expected no less from who his parents were. Alana had the brains and Margot had the means to give the boy a rather extensive education. It reminded Hannibal a bit of his childhood.

“No,” Hannibal replied, turning away from the window he had been looking out of and making his way over to the counter that the boy was working at, two bowls and two spoons already out on the counter. “I assume you couldn’t either?’

“Nope,” the boy answered as he went to the fridge, struggling to pull out a jug of milk. “I miss Winston.”

Hannibal took a seat at the counter, setting his crutches aside and watched the boy curiously, not offering his help as the child shoved the milk up onto the counter that was taller than him. He then went to the pantry and pulled open the door, looking inside.

“It’s lonely without him in my bed,” Morgan continued as he went for a chair, pushing it over to the pantry, the legs squeaking across the floor.

Such a simple complaint, Hannibal noted nearly wishing that his own complaints were as simple. “Won’t one of your mothers hear you?” Hannibal asked, still watching intently as the kid climbed up onto the chair and stretched out onto the tip toes of one foot to barely reach the cereal box he desperately wanted.

“No,” he answered, tongue out in concentration. His fingers wedged the box out and he lowered himself back down, pushing the chair back over by Hannibal. His tiny hands pushed the box up beside the milk and he climbed onto the chair with a huff, looking proud of himself. “They never hear me. Why couldn’t you sleep?”

Hannibal mused over the question, lips pursed as Morgan poured them both a bowl of some sort of colorful fruit shaped pieces from a red box with a poorly drawn cartoon rabbit. Next came the milk, a good portion of it gracing the counter before each bowl.

“I am missing someone too,” Hannibal finally decided on, taking the spoon the boy held out for him. It was curious to Hannibal how the kid didn’t seem at all afraid of him while his mothers avoided him like the plague unless he needed any sort of help physically that he was unable to do for himself as of yet.

“That man that took Winston, right?”

“Perceptive,” Hannibal mumbled.

Morgan pushed back his hair with the fist that clutched at the spoon before digging into his bowl of cereal. Hannibal glanced down at his own and felt the odd need to not be rude to this boy who had worked so hard to get this for him. He took a spoonful into his mouth. It crunched sickeningly in his mouth like bones softened from over boiling. The artificial wanting to be called fruit chemical was assaulting and Hannibal frowned.

“You don’t have to eat it,” Morgan excused with a bright smile at Hannibal before turning back to his bowl to enjoy it. “Was the man your friend?”

“Yes.”

“A friend like my moms?”

Hannibal lowered the spoon back into the bowl and closed his eyes at a painful twitch in his chest. He gave a nod and Morgan hummed, but didn’t say anything. The only sound was the munching of the crystalized sugary breakfast food.

“Then why aren’t you together?”

The question caught Hannibal off guard, the words loud in the dark kitchen that was lit only by the moon. Hannibal glanced down at the kid once more wondering if one of his parents had put him up to this. Wondering what Alana or Margot would do if he stopped breathing. Wondering if Morgan would fight him if he wrapped a single hand around his neck.

“It is a difficult situation that I am not sure you would understand,” Hannibal replied, pushing his bowl over to Morgan who had finished off his own. Morgan grinned and dug in without hesitation.

“Mommy said that he didn’t remember you. I didn’t know that people could forget things like other people.”

Would Margot cry if this boy was dead? All of her money would be left for the church to use, ripped away from her like her brother so desperately wanted. Would she mourn the child or her money more?

“It’s not common, but possible,” Hannibal offered, arms folded on the counter.

“Why did he forget you?”

Would Alana scream if this boy was dead? Would she hunt Hannibal down and end him? All of her money would be left for the church to use, ripped away from her just as her brother-in-law so desperately wanted. Would she mourn the child or her money more?

“He hit his head.” Hannibal shivered at the icy cold clasp of the ocean, something somehow more vivid than the river had been. “It hurt his brain.”

Morgan gave a nod. “He has to remember you some time. Isn’t that how love is supposed to work? My mommies fight a lot, but they always love each other.”

“This isn’t exactly the same,” Hannibal grumbled, picking at the sleeve of his sweater, creating a loose thread where one hadn’t been.

“But you love him.”

Would you mourn your child or your money more?

Chapter End Notes

Taigi švelnus-So gentle
Mano mylimasis-My precious

Thanks again to my sister and my wonderful beta, @PitaGonzalezMe on twitter.

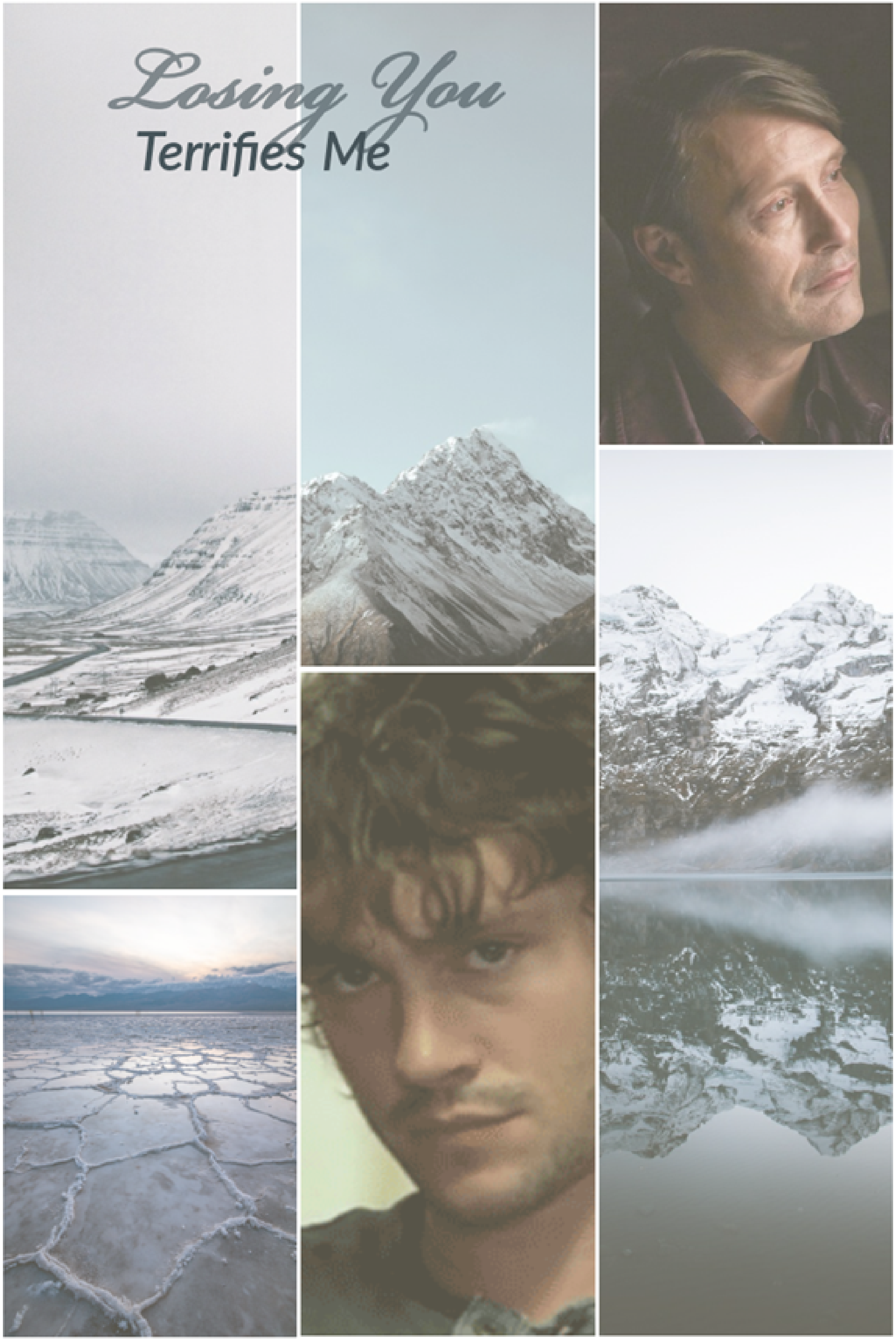
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

> “I’m not normal, Molly. You knew this when you married me.”
>
> “You don’t have to be normal, Will. I like you the way you are!” Molly shot back. “This is about you having the best life you can and it is not going to happen with anything killer related in your head.”
>
> “You can’t just take away parts of me, Molly. This is what I am.”

Chapter Notes

> Locatelli’s Concerto Grosso No. 4 in E minor:
> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_OCTeM7c0E
>
> Thanks again to my sister and my wonderful beta, @PitaGonzalezMe on twitter.


Losing You
Terrifies Me

“Is there a Jordan or a Casey on that list?” Will asked, gloved hand rubbing oddly at his face as he held onto himself. He could only stare at the bodies laid out on the autopsy tables.

Price gave a frown as he looked over the clipboard in his hand. “No, no Jordan or Casey that I can see. And no guests by that name either.”

Will frowned with a deep sigh. He closed his eyes for a moment, opening them again at a new presence in the room. “People can change their names, you know.”

Will’s eyes widened as his gaze fell upon Beverly Katz who was leaning over the husband, long hair held back by one hand as if she could somehow mess with the bodies. As if she were alive.

“I changed my name,” she continued, causing Will to smirk lightly. “Was not going to stay Mrs. Beverly Slader, that’s for sure.”

“How do we trace that?” Will questioned, unknown to him, pulling Price and Zeller’s gazes from their work at the uttered sentence. Maybe he was just thinking aloud. Will often did that. “It’s not like we can dig through all of their-”

“You get pictures of all of them, dumbass,” Beverly replied with a laugh. “If you think you know who they are, you’ll recognize their photos. They must have them on record somewhere.”

“We need to get photos of everyone on that list,” Will instructed.

“There’s like 60 families on this list,” Price pointed out with a huff of annoyance.

“What are the photos going to do?” Zeller questioned, resting his hip against one of the tables with his arms folded. “Why were you asking about those specific names?”

“I was at dinner the other night and ran into some friends. One of them had scratches down his hand,” Will replied with a small shrug. “He said it was the cat.”

“It wasn’t the cat,” Beverly pushed, smiling bright. “Too big.”

“It could have been a cat,” Price offered with a shrug. “Did you know that cats spend 70% of their lives sleeping. Wouldn’t that be nice?”

“It wasn’t a cat,” Will grumbled. “He had no fur on his suit. He’s very meticulous. He wears the suit constantly. It’s his shield, his comfort.”

“And if this is how you psychoanalyze your friends, what do you do with us?” Zeller asked with a small smile.

“I try to avoid psychoanalyzing you,” Will replied nonchalantly. “You are my friends, they are people that Molly considers friends.”

The room fell silent, all eyes on Will, including Beverly who wore a bemused grin, arms folded over her chest and hip jutted out to the side. Will blinked, taking in the looks from his colleagues before what he had said finally occurred to him.

“We’re his friends,” Zeller stated with a growing smile. “Did you hear that Jimmy?”

“I sure did, Brian,” Price replied with a nod, his own smile on his face.

Will groaned, pulling the latex from his hands. “Just get me pictures of all the people on that list.”

“Of course best friend!” Price said with a laugh.

Will rolled his eyes and went for the door, tossing his gloves into a waste basket.

“Anything you want, best friend!” Zeller called out before the door could close behind Will.

Will ran a hand through his curls, making his way down the hall. “Was I a best friend too?” Beverly asked as she kept up with Will, though her footsteps did not sound down the hallway like his did. Will shot her an incredulous look and Beverly smiled, hair bouncing as she walked. “Was I more than a best friend?”

“You were the only one who believed me and helped. And I got you killed.” Will pulled his car keys from his pocket and pushed open the door to the parking lot, heading to his Volvo.

“I got me killed,” she disagreed, voice still light and playful as it always was. “I didn’t listen to you. I went off on my own.”

“I wish...” Will paused, hands resting on the roof of his car with a deep sigh. “I wish I could remember what happened.”

“It will come to you soon,” Beverly assured, leaning against the other side of the car, arms folded on the roof. “You get snippets of things everyday. It will come back.”

“Do I want it back?”

Beverly snorted with a nod of her head. “Of course you want it back. It might be painful, but it's yours. You want it back.”

“How are you so sure?”

“Because I’m you, aren’t I?”

Will blinked and Beverly was gone, as if she had never existed, leaving Will alone in a cold empty parking lot. Will stared at where she had been, his eyes flickering around her person, hoping that she would come back. He missed her. She was... different from the others. She stayed by his side until the very end and he would always be so grateful for that, even if he never remembered it.

“Molly,” Will said as he entered the house, calling the woman’s eyes to his face. “Can we talk?”

“I suppose it's possible,” she replied teasingly, but Will could already sense the walls going up between them.

“Where’s Wally?”

“At Danny’s.”

Will gave a frown and Molly rolled her eyes, obviously not in the mood for Will’s working theories. Will didn’t push it though, simply picked up the red covered book that had been among his things at the hospital and looked over it, as he sat on the couch.

“Can you put that away tonight?” Molly questioned, getting from the couch as if Will were a magnet and they were opposite poles. Will watched her walk away from him and he could feel a coldness across his skin at the rejection. “It’s been sitting there for weeks.”

Will opened the book and skimmed through the first few pages, eyes glancing quickly over the words, having never seen them before, but being able to immediately hear what they were meant to sound like.

“Did I ever know Italian?” Will asked as the words flowed through him, their meaning lost, but operatic in their movement.

“Not that I am aware of,” Molly answered from somewhere in the kitchen.

“Strange,” he muttered, closing the book that felt like an extension of himself. “Molly, I need you to be honest with me.”

“Only if the favor is returned,” Molly said, tone a single note, not arguing, just being.

Will tipped his head and glanced over his shoulder to where Molly was standing at the sink, looking out of the small window at the sunset. “Of course,” Will answered. “What did you want to know?”

“Are you working cases for Jack again?”

Will was quiet for a moment, thinking of the best way to go about this. He didn’t want anymore walls. He didn’t want to feel blocked out and hidden away. He wanted everything to go back to how it was before he ended up in the hospital.

“One scene,” he answered. “I went to one scene, that is it.”

“Will,” Molly scolded, though she didn’t look back. “Jack said-”

“He gave me every possible out. I chose to go,” Will defended, turning on the couch to better see his wife. “He needed help and I was there.”

“You’ve been having nightmares again,” Molly threw out. “You know what this does to you.”

“No, I haven’t,” Will stated, confusion on his face as he thought back over the last few nights.

“I told you not to lie to me Will.”

“I’m not lying,” he said with a nervous laugh, causing Molly to glance back at him before returning her gaze back out of the window. “I didn’t have a nightmare. I just can’t sleep. That’s why I get up so early. I just can’t sleep anymore.”

“And how much do you remember about your past?”

The question was interesting to Will and made him rise to his feet to fully face the woman who had closed herself off from him. “Only bits and pieces,” he answered. “Why do you want to know?”

“What do you remember?” Molly pressed, ignoring Will’s question.

Will stepped a little more into the kitchen, standing on the other side of the counter from Molly, but not daring to reach out and touch her. “I can remember bits and pieces of some cases. The angel one looms over me daily. I can recall being in the mental institution. Not in great detail, just like what I wore and the bed. Some of my trail is there, though I am still lost as to how I was let off. I recall the evidence being damning. And there's whispers of conversations, but I don't know who's saying them." He hoped that that was enough for her. He didn't want to tell her anymore about what he remembered. Or what he thought had to be memories and not just dreams and visions that he was so prone to having. Reality and fiction blurring their lines on, what felt like, purpose just to confuse him, just because they could and thought it would be funny.

She gave a small nod, fingers drumming on the sink. He knew it wasn't enough for her, but he wasn't about to admit that there was an odd man living up in his mind with insanely colored suits and sharp cheekbones with silvering hair and artistic fingers that liked to touch Will in ways that no one should have permission to touch him, but that Will honestly didn't mind it. And he absolutely did not want to admit that the man in his mind was based off of some random relative of Margot or Alana that he had maybe said 20 words to.

No, that was a lie. He had said exactly one hundred words to the man. One hundred words that somehow entitled the man to the bed in his mind. What was wrong with him?

"Was there anything else you wanted to know?" Will asked, breaking up the silence. Molly gave a small shake of her head and sighed, waiting for Will's question as if she already knew what it was. "Why did you block the Minnesota Shrike case?"

Molly gave a curious look and finally turned to face Will and Will looked over her face now incredibly interested as to what she thought he was going to ask her and if that would have been a better thing to ask.

"I was just trying to protect you," Molly answered with a deep breath. "I thought that if you didn't remember then the nightmares wouldn't come back. That maybe you could have a normal life without all of the darkness."

"I'm not normal, Molly. You knew this when you married me."

"You don't have to be normal, Will. I like you the way you are!" Molly shot back. "This is about you having the best life you can and it is not going to happen with anything killer related in your head."

"You can't just take away parts of me, Molly. This is what I am." Will's hands went to his chest at a tightness there as if he couldn't bring in enough oxygen for his blood to flow. "This is what I have always been, what I've been doing as long as I can remember, though that's spotty as of late. This is me, Molly. You used to be able to accept that."

"You weren't pursuing this!" Molly shouted, tears in her eyes. "You were happy fixing boats, ignoring the monsters at the door. Why are you letting them back in again?"

"Because it's the only time that I feel normal," Will offered out, seeing the dislike in Molly's eyes the moment the words were internalized. "I don't expect you to understand. No one has ever understood, but I'm not going to change what I am."

Molly was silent, jaw tight and Will could feel the heat radiating off her, though she wasn't going to explode. She wasn't that type of woman. She was patient and kind and thoughtful. She wouldn't break him apart like others had.

"Anything else?" she asked after a moment.

“Will you unblock them?” Will asked softly. Molly shook her head and Will gave a nod. “If I so desperately want to know, then I can look elsewhere is what I am inferring.”

“You’ve already gone searching,” Molly pointed out with a steadying inhale. “You have all the access to Jack that you want. I’m sure he told you.”

Will shook his head. “He didn’t tell me. I did search though.”

“And?”

“And what?” Will asked with a shrug. “I don’t remember the case. I read it over a million times, read every little horrid detail and I still don’t remember it. I killed a man, Molly-”

“-For self-defense-”

“-and I don’t remember it.” Will sighed, rubbing at his eyes, feeling very tired all of a sudden, drained of all strength and want of continuing this conversation that so badly needed to continue. They wouldn’t be whole until they sorted all of the secrets between them out. “I don’t remember any of it.” Will gave a small laugh. “Do you know how hard that is? Not remembering?” Molly was silent, waiting for Will to continue. “It eats at you. You want to know what you’re missing. You want to know why the dots don’t connect.”

“I don’t think I’m the person to help you with that,” Molly muttered, arms folding over her chest.

“What are you saying?” Will asked, brows furrowing as his head tipped to the side.

“I think we need a break.”

“A break?” Will repeated weakly, going to step around the counter, only to freeze at an upheld hand by Molly.

“I thought I could handle this, but obviously I can’t, and you are not the same man that I married.”

Will’s heart dropped in his chest, a shattering feeling in the back of his mind, reminding him that he was never really whole and that he was just drifting on sand and not stable on bedrock. He licked at his lips and his eyes flickered around the room, trying to find something to purchase on.

“I was only in that hospital a week, Molly. I couldn’t have-”

“Try months, Will,” Molly said sharply, silencing the empath. Will blinked. He hadn’t known. No one had told him the exact date. He had just assumed... “It took a lot to pick up the pieces of you being gone. It was a large adjustment and I don’t think Wally and I are ready to make the adjustment back.”

“What are you saying Molly?” Will asked softly, knowing the answer, but unsure if he could accept it.

“I am going to take Wally to my parents’ house while we work some stuff out. I can’t be here right now. I can’t be around you right now.” Molly’s voice shook and Will was doing his best to try to pull up the appropriate emotion to show, but he couldn’t seem to find one. He just stood in silence, unable to pull together any person from his past to play his mask. “I’ll be leaving in the morning. I would appreciate it if you didn’t come to bed tonight.”

“You can’t take my son from me,” Will got out, the only thing he could think that a normal person would say in this instance.

“He’s not your son, Will,” Molly reminded. “You can visit him if this stays permanent. He likes you and you are good to him, you proved to me during dinner the other night that you care about him, but he is not your son.”

Will gave a small accepting nod, wishing he was feeling something other than a numbness. Wishing this was hurting him the way he was certain that it should be. It should be pulling at his heart, tearing apart his world. He should be pleading, begging, bargaining with Molly not to go, but there wasn’t that spark of a fight in his system. There should have been shouts and tears. Losing her should be killing him. He wished that his heart was breaking, but there was nothing there. He felt more bad about not feeling bad....

“Hanni,” Morgan said as he munched on a grilled cheese sandwich. Hannibal frowned at the accursed nickname that the child had begun to refer to him as, almost making Hannibal wish he had closed his hand around the kid’s throat a few nights back when they had shared a midnight snack together. “What’s your favorite color?”

Hannibal didn’t miss the way that Alana smirked from where she was eating her salad on the other side of the table. Margot was apparently in a business meeting and had been unable to join them for lunch.

“Red, I suppose,” he muttered, knowing better than to push off the child while Alana was in the room. Not that he would do it anyways. Hannibal knew the balancing act he was in. He had to play the dutiful part of gracious company, after all, that’s what he was.

“Why?”

“It reminds me of-” Hannibal paused as Alana cleared her throat, eyes expectant. “Ribbons,” Hannibal finished, picking at his own soup. He was so tired of eating soup. He understood the purpose of it and knew a liquid diet was important, but he really wanted something more than a bowl of broth. Especially if it was something that he didn’t make himself from scratch and was certain was from a bottle or can, a chemical underlying flavor in every spoonful.

“What’s your favorite-”

“Do you have anything else you like to do rather than ask an endless amount of questions?” Hannibal interrupted, unsure if he could take the tiny voice anymore. He had been nice, he had played this game for the better part of the day, he had let the kid follow him around like a lost puppy and he was regretting that he valued politeness so heavily.

“What’s your favorite candy?”

Hannibal let out a small growl, his emotions less in check these days now that he didn’t have to pretend what he was around Alana any longer.

“Morgan, that’s enough,” Alana stated firmly.

“Do you like hunting?” the boy continued, subject changing as quickly as a snap of a neck.

Hannibal glanced up at Alana who lowered her fork back to her plate at the child's question. This could be fun.

"In a sense, I suppose so," Hannibal replied, receiving a dark look from Alana.

"I think it's mean," Morgan announced around a mouthful of sandwich. He placed the sandwich back on his plate as he kicked his legs in his chair happily.

"And why is that?"

"Isn't it rude?" Morgan replied, attention going to his mother whose eyes were wide and set on Hannibal.

Hannibal felt his lip twitch up in amusement at the comment. A dilemma that Hannibal had never once considered before in his artistic devotion. Hannibal's hands rested under his chin as he thought about the young child's words, playing them over and over in his mind.

"And what makes you think that?" Hannibal asked curiously, watching the boy reach back up for the rest of his sandwich.

"That's enough," Alana breathed out, but Hannibal ignored her.

"Well, taking life isn't kind." Morgan gave a shrug, head tipping from side to side at the last bite of his food. "At least, that's what mommy taught me."

"And what if the ends justify the means?" Hannibal pushed, ignoring the daggers shot at him from across the table, all interest held on this small boy.

"Hannibal, that's enough," Alana said, getting to her feet. "Morgan, go play with Applesauce now."

They boy seemed as enthralled in their conversation that Hannibal was, because he ignored his mother's order-so unlike him- and tipped his head to the side in question. "What does that mean?"

"A good outcome excuses any wrongs committed to attain it," Hannibal explained.

"It's still rude," Morgan answered, hoping down from his chair as Alana came round the side of the table. "Applesauce," he called. The dog jumped up from where she had been laying beside his chair and followed him to the door. "Bye Hanni." The boy raced from the dining room before Alana could reach him and Hannibal looked up at the woman who now stood beside him.

"You are in my home because I am being a good host, do not think that that gives you permission to corrupt my son," Alana hissed, more anger in her when Hannibal's face stayed blank and uncaring.

"I doubt I could corrupt him, Dr. Bloom," Hannibal said softly, his good mannered self back in place as he pushed his unfinished soup aside. "He's strong willed."

"So was Will and you skewed with his mind. Drove him mad," Alana pointed out coldly.

"I did not corrupt. I influenced. He followed," Hannibal explained, eyes dark in their red murkiness. Alana gave a sound of disapproval and Hannibal's eyebrows rose. "I did nothing more than show him what he could be. I did not force him to do anything, his decisions were his own."

“That’s your excuse?” Alana questioned, arms folding over her chest as her hip rested against the table’s edge. “You’re not even going to acknowledge everything you did to frame him for those crimes? What about his lures? Making him swallow the ear? The lost time?”

Alana would be lying if she said she wasn’t unsettled by the surprisingly innocent expression that took over Hannibal’s face as if he had been accused of something far worse than murder.

“I would not have bothered with anyone else, but Will,” he said softly, each word carefully picked as if this was a confession.

“Why was Will so special? Why did he deserve any of that then?” Alana stood up a little straighter at Hannibal’s silence and could just barely pick out a light dusting of pink over the man’s cheeks. Her eyes widened as realization set in. “Oh my god.” She blinked several times, mouth open as she tried to put the thoughts into words. “That is how you show your love. You were *courting* him.” The words came out in equals parts shock and horror.

With a defeated sigh, Will tossed the last picture aside, the desk covered in them. Will leaned forward in his chair, elbows on his knees, fingertips over his mouth.

“You don’t recognize any of them?” Jack asked, taking a seat in his own chair behind his desk that was now a mess. Will shook his head and Jack frowned. “Then maybe your friend was scratched by a cat.”

“They are not my friends,” Will grumbled with a hint of anger in his tone.

“And it wasn’t a cat,” Beverly’s voice said behind him, a hand taking his shoulder with a firm grip. Will closed his eyes and relaxed into it, thankful that there was something to ground him, even if it was just his own manifestation of regrets.

“If none of them are among this list then it’s time to look for a new theory,” Jack said with a shrug. “You need to twist theories to match the facts, not the other way around.”

“They fit the profile,” Will sighed and shrugged. “Alright. New theory.” Will rose from the chair and stretched, his spine cracking loudly in the room. “What do all of the families have in common?” Will began pacing across the office. “The children were all shot in the head after the parents were stabbed 13 times.”

“Each family has a total of six people in it,” Jack offered. “They’re all influential or part of higher society.”

“They have money and flaunt it,” Will added on. “They recently came into money, via the lottery or a family member passing away. They didn’t make the money themselves.”

“They all live in gated communities.”

Will stopped in his step and looked over at Jack who gave a questioning look back, not sure of the significance of what he had just said. “They what?” Will asked, wanting it repeated.

“They live in gated communities,” Jack replied slowly.

“Are all of them as strict as where this last murder took place?”

“Like Fort Knox?” Jack asked, nodding. “Yeah, they were.”

“How are people getting in?” Will muttered, rubbing at his neck that was aching from the off angle it had been in.

“Come on Will,” Beverly chastised, arms folded over her chest with her normal cocky smile. “How else would someone be allowed into those places? What people are allowed in without being looked at weirdly.”

“The employees,” Will whispered, eyes widening as he stepped up to Jack’s desk, hands taking the edges. “We need to look at employees from each gated community.”

“All of them? There will be hundreds,” Jack pointed out, looking a bit annoyed at the idea of the daunting searching.

“No,” Will shook his head. “We need to find common companies between them. They probably hire out at the same places. We’ll look at the common companies and see which employees have worked at all of the communities that have had murders in them. That’s how we’ll narrow it down.”

“Look at you being smart,” Beverly teased, sitting on the edge of Jack’s desk. “What did we ever do without you?” Will shot her a small smile, knowing that they had been just fine without him, but the compliment still felt good.

“I will get Zeller on this right after we discuss the elephant in the room.”

Will’s smile fell at Jack’s words and Beverly disappeared. “What do you mean?” Will asked softly, stepping away from the desk until the back of his knees hit his chair and he collapsed into it.

“You’re not wearing your wedding ring anymore,” Jack pointed out. Will glanced down at his finger. “And you seem fine.”

“I am fine,” Will said with a nod, not wanting to look up from the finger that was discolored from a tan line of his ring. “Honestly, I am. I thought I wouldn’t be, but I’m ok.”

“Do you need somewhere to stay?”

Will shook his head, grateful for the concern in Jack’s voice, though he still couldn't bring himself to look up at the man. “She went to stay with her parents. She took Wally with her.”

“I’m sorry, Will.”

Will’s brows furrowed. “It’s a relief.” Will frowned as the words left his mouth, fingers drumming on the armrest of the chair. “I felt like I was intruding on a life that wasn’t mine anymore. Should I feel that way?”

“They’re your feelings Will. I’m not a psychiatrist,” Jack said gently. “You were gone for a long time. I’m sure that it was just Molly trying to make due without you and worrying that you weren’t coming back. She had to restart all over again like she did when Wally’s father left. She still loves you, I’m sure.”

“I still...” Will sat up a little more, hands rubbing at his jeans at his thighs. “I still love her, I think. But it doesn't feel the same.”

“Again, you were gone for a long time.” Jack gave a shrug, beginning to gather up the mess that was across his desk and organize it.

“She said months,” Will muttered. “But I can’t remember. There’s so many things missing.” Jack sighed, a hand rubbing at his forehead as if he were trying to decide whether to tell Will something or not. Will didn’t miss the expression. He got back to his feet. “What have I not been told, Jack?”

“That is something you need to take up with Molly,” Jack said sternly. “I am not about to get in the middle of this.”

“Why is everyone trying to protect me from something?” Will demanded, fist hitting Jack’s desk much to both men’s surprise. Will’s face softened. “I’m tired of being trapped in the dark. I just want my life to make sense again. It’s so jumbled and disjointed and I don’t know what’s real or what’s fake or what are nightmares or facts. No one else will tell me Jack.”

Jack sighed heavily, the conflict still on his face. The silence was long and tense and Will hoped that if he held it Jack would eventually crack. And just as Will wanted, Jack gave in. He busied himself at his desk for a moment, pulling out two glasses and a bottle of bourbon, pouring each of them a glass and nodding at the one closest to Will.

Will moved his chair forward and took the glass, taking a small sip, letting the liquid burn pleasantly on the way down. Jack finished off his glass before pouring himself another and leaning back in his chair, drink in hand.

“What do you remember about the Ripper?” Jack questioned, trying to gage exactly where he needed to start the story and how many details he was going to need to add to it.

Will blinked in confusion for a moment or two, struggling to find a good answer. “Umm... just the cases. I don’t even remember going to the crime scenes. I just know what they were and when they happened.”

Jack gave a nod. “You were very close to the Ripper.”

“Yeah, he attacked me,” Will interrupted.

“That’s not what I mean,” Jack muttered with a small shake of his head and a frown. “We were all very close to him. Friends.”

Will gave a loud laugh that was full of nervous energy and shook his head, curls bouncing wildly. “With the Ripper?” Will asked. “Friends?”

“You two were incredibly close,” Jack continued, taking a sip of his drink. “We had him incarcerated for a time. About three years. You met Molly in that time. There was another killer, The Great Red Dragon, who came along. Tried to kill Molly and Walter while you were gone.”

Will gave a huff of air with a pained smile, rubbing at his jaw before taking a deep swallow of his drink, understanding why Jack had given it to him. “I don’t remember,” he muttered and Jack could read the guilt over every inch of the man’s body. “Molly didn’t even mention it.”

“I doubt she wants to remember it.”

Will gave a small nod of his head, eyes firmly on his cup. His fingernails clicked against the glass for a moment, filling the silence until Jack finally continued.

“We had a plan set up with Alana, she was the one in charge of the Ripper’s care. We were going to use the Ripper to find The Great Red Dragon, he had taken a liking to the Ripper.”

Will glanced up as the story continued, trying to find where he fit into all of this and also try to place why, if they knew him so closely, Jack would not call the man by name. But Jack didn’t meet his gaze, simply held out the bottle of bourbon for Will to refill his glass, which Will did with easy movements, muscle memory from long nights trying anything to chase the nightmares away.

“The Great Red Dragon found your transport and killed all of the officers, letting you two escape. We assumed that the Ripper took you hostage. We weren’t able to find where he took you or what happened to The Great Red Dragon. We assume that he’s dead because there haven't been any other murders from him, but we haven’t found a body.”

Will closed his eyes and downed his glass in one go hoping that maybe the veil of alcohol would release something instead of hiding it like it normally did. He doubted that would be the case. He couldn’t remember his serial killer best friends, what made him think he would remember killing The Great Red Dragon? If he did kill The Great Red Dragon... It was possible. Will knew there were darker things inside of him that he pushed down religiously, had a horrible feeling that there were awful things that he had done that he forgot as well.

“You were with the Ripper for three months. I found you and the Ripper in New York during Christmas. You escaped until the Ripper gave you up.”

“Gave me up?” Will asked with a sick feeling in his stomach accompanying the burn of the alcohol that he was about to consume more of. “What do you mean gave me up?”

“You needed medical help.”

“He was a doctor, wasn’t he? He had medical know-how.”

“Not for your mind, Will,” Jack said bluntly, setting his glass aside and meeting Will’s gaze head on. “You, according to his medical journal of your time together, continued to lose your memory and regain it in those three months. This last time he decided that you needed proper medical help and he let us find you.”

Will stared back into those eyes trying to find a lie in them and finding none, let the words wash over him. He had had memory problems in the past. That would explain all the blank spaces. It was an ongoing condition and maybe Molly had been present for one or two of his resets. He would have to ask if that was one of the problems. He just couldn’t seem to wrap his head around being close to the Ripper. Close enough that he stayed with the Ripper for three months.

“I wasn’t physically hurt when you found me, was I?” Will asked, setting his once more emptied glass aside too.

Jack shook his head. “Some bruising around your face was all. The scarring on your cheek was fresh, but the nurses said it was because you had recently had some stitching removed. Other than that and some similar scaring on your shoulder, there was nothing physically wrong with you.”

Will's hand went to his shoulder where one of many scars he didn't recognize sat, an answer to finally put that small mystery mostly to rest. "He didn't hurt me?"

Jack shook his head. "He wouldn't hurt you Will. Not unless you did something to hurt him. And you two seemed very comfortable when I ran into you. You were drinking coffee and looked like you had just gone shopping."

"Jack, who is the Ripper?" Will asked, finally having the courage to obtain the man's name. Jack was quiet though, the same conflict on his face as at the beginning of the story, as if he was debating whether Molly would come for him or not. That was enough to make Will's throat go dry and his hands to tremble. "Who is Dr. Hannibal Lecter, Jack?"

"And how is my favorite patient doing today?" Liam asked, tossing his bag of medical gear unceremoniously onto the bed beside Hannibal's leg.

"Am I your favorite because I am me, or because I am your only patient?" Hannibal asked, hands marking the page of the book he had been on and setting it aside.

"I have a multitude of other patients, Dr. Lecter," Liam answered, opening his bag and pulling out his stethoscope. "Do not think of yourself as so special. Underground work is not pretty, but it pays well and I would not limit myself to one patient."

"Nor should you," Hannibal agreed with a small nod, sitting up a bit more in bed so that Liam could place the chest piece to Hannibal's back.

Hannibal inhaled deeply without needing to be instructed, held it for a moment and let it go. The piece moved again and Hannibal repeated his breathing. Hands then pushed him back and Liam listened to his breathing from his chest before giving a satisfactory nod.

"Margot says that you haven't left your bed in two days. That has me concerned," Liam stated. "You need to be up and moving. It will help your recovery."

"I've been under the weather," Hannibal simply stated, leaning back against the bed frame as Liam put the stethoscope back into his bag.

"Physically?"

"Emotionally."

"I would recommend therapy, but..." Liam gave a shrug with a smile that made Hannibal's lips twitch up. "I doubt there is anyone who could sort out your mind, Dr. Lecter."

Hannibal gave a small chuckle. It was a nice change of pace to speak to someone other than the child, though their conversations did hold a small amount of charm in them, Hannibal did not want to dwell in a room with the child longer than he needed to.

"We should be able to take out your stitches today, unless you would rather do that yourself." At a shake of Hannibal's head in answer, Liam set to work, helping Hannibal out of the giant quilt on the bed and carefully pulling the leg of his lodge pants up over the bandaging around the doctor's knee. "I thought you said you only liked your hands operating on yourself."

“It seems for the moment I have changed my mind,” Hannibal muttered tiredly, closing his eyes and letting Liam gingerly bend his knee and begin to remove the wrappings. There was a tingling as blood flow began to race through the now more open pathways and Hannibal exhaled deeply.

“I do suggest that you get out of bed while I am here. Go for a walk through the grounds. It might help you clear your mind, find your balance,” Liam suggested, taking an alcohol wipe and cleaning at the three small incisions on the man’s leg. Hannibal didn’t reply, simply sat still. “Is it that difficult for you to not be in control?”

“Terribly so. Is it that obvious?” Hannibal mused softly, sounding as if on the verge of sleep. Liam gave a small snort in answer as he began to snip through the stitching and pull it free. “I am in a precarious position while I reside in this home. I must be on my best behavior at all times and it has become rather draining.”

“The exercise will do you good.”

“Don’t start sounding too much like a proper doctor,” Hannibal teased lightly. “I might ask to see your license, Dr. Jefferies.”

Liam gave a small laugh and they fell into a comfortable silence while Liam finished his work. He cleaned the wounds once more and began to wrap up Hannibal’s knee when the man began to hum something haunting, but beautiful. Liam liked to consider himself somewhat versed in classical music as his father enjoyed listening to it nearly every waking moment of the day, but he couldn’t exactly place the piece that was being hummed. As if sensing the question in the air, Hannibal spoke.

“Locatelli’s Concerto Grosso No. 4 in E minor.”

Liam gave a nod even though Hannibal’s eyes were still shut tight. Hannibal continued to hum through the piece as Liam checked over the rest of his work and finding it satisfactory, Liam packed up his things and stood with hands on his hips, waiting for Hannibal to return to the waking world before interrupting.

“Time for a walk, Hannibal. We need to start trying to work the strength back up in your knee.”

“If I were you, I would keep me immobile.” Hannibal’s dark eyes opened. “You won’t like when I’m able to run again.”

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

> Will’s breath was hot at Hannibal’s ear. “I know your secret, Dr. Lecter,” he whispered, waiting for a reaction from the man.

Chapter Notes

> Apparently this was the song I listened to for this chapter when I wrote it. Oh lord. What's wrong with me? Hahah.
>
> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYrWsko0Jio

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Losing You
Terrifies Me
Hannibal

Will stepped from his car and frowned as Molly, who was already waiting for him, aggressively straightened his tie. "Why are we doing this again?" Will questioned, wanting to run away.

"Because you said we would when we were at dinner the other night," Molly explained. “And Walter is very excited about having dinner here.”

“Do they know that we’re separated?” Will asked in a hushed voice as the front door to the rather massive home was opened. Danny raced out and snatched up Walter’s hand, pulling the boy inside of the house while Casey and Jordan waited on the doorstep patiently.

“No and we are going to stay civil so that Walter has some form of normality,” Molly replied, releasing Will now that she was satisfied with his tie and the two of them began up the driveway to the house. “Besides, they like you and how macabre you are.”

Will sighed and did his best to place his sociable mask on, one that was beaten and torn apart, tattered from years of nearly constant use. Jordan had a hand around Casey’s shoulder, oddly enough not wearing his suit. Maybe he had been telling the truth. Instead he wore a pair of slacks with a sweater, still something far nicer than anything Will owned, but not a suit. Casey looked perfectly happy in his jeans and flannel.

“How nice to see you again,” Casey said, hugging Molly as they reached the doorstep. Will was grateful that the hug did not extend to him and he was greeted simply with a hand shake from both men before being welcomed into their home.

It was spacious and decorated warmly unsteady of the coldness that Will thought it would be. There was a staircase in the middle that separated several rooms. To the right was a formal sitting room and Will would make out a piano, tall and proud in the center of the room. There was a formal dining room hidden behind that. On the other side was the kitchen that opened up into another sitting room where the two boys were playing with a pitch black kitten and a sting with feathers on it.

“Leonard,” Wally laughed as the cat jumped up to snatch at the feathers.

Will frowned and bit his bottom lip. They did have a cat. Jordan hadn’t been lying. Jack had been right. Will needed to stop trying to twist the facts to fit his profile. There had to be plenty of other people out there that would fit the profile. There always were multiple suspects. People fell into a multitude of categories.

“I’m afraid that dinner is not yet finished,” Jordan said as he began to roll up his sleeves.

Will watched curiously as Jordan quickly thought better of it and pulled the sleeves of his sweater down even further than they had been, effectively hiding the scratch marks that were still there that Will was certain Beverly was telling him were still not made by a cat.

“*Ukochany,”* Jordan stated, calling Casey’s attention from his conversation with Molly. “Why don’t you show them the music room while I finish up with the cooking?”

Casey gave a small nod and led Molly and a desperately wanting to keep an eye on Jordan, Will to the formal living room where the piano sat tall and proud, polished to perfection. Back behind the piano was a harp that Will had missed and he immediately felt very lower middle class and embarrassed that they had invited this couple over to their own home for dinner a week or so ago.

“Do you play?” Molly asked, trying to break up the silence in the room as Will wandered over to the piano.

“Me?” Casey asked with a smile. “No. Not very well, but Jordan does. He’s very talented in a lot of aspects. Plays the violin as well.” Will’s fingers trailed over the white keys, though not adding enough pressure to them to make any sort of sound. “Do either of you play?” Casey wore a smile as he watched Will.

“No,” Molly answered with a shake of her head.

“Not the piano. The guitar a bit,” Will answered, fingers finding certain notes and pressing them, the tone not half bad. His fingers moved naturally across the keys, something akin to a lullaby filling the house.

“Claire De Lune,” Casey said lightly behind Will. “I thought you didn’t know how to play the piano, William.”

“Just Will,” he corrected. “I don’t as far as I’m aware.” Will gave a nervous laugh as the song continued for a few notes more before he stopped. He glanced up at Molly who gave him a look that said she didn’t know he could play either. Had he been taught how to play in those three missing months? Had Hannibal taught him to play the piano?

The conversation around him was garbled like he was underwater and he couldn’t exactly pull himself up to the surface to join the conversation. It droned on in the background as he tried with all of his might to remember learning how to play the piano. Not that he was masterful in any way, knowing one small song, but it was more than he had ever known before.

“...witches.” There was a laugh from Molly and Casey and Will looked up, blinking.

“What?” he asked, leaving the piano and moving closer.

“Oh, just something on Tattle-Crimes,” Casey replied. “Something about a coven of witches or something. Do you read the blog?”

“I am unfortunately close to the author,” Will grumbled, pulling his phone from his pocket. He pulled up the website that was now unblocked and went to the newest entry, skimming over the title. *Special Agent Will Graham Has Returned, Cries Witches.* Will frowned. “She doesn’t like me much.”

“Dinner is ready!” the Polish accent called from the kitchen as Jordan entered the dining room, setting items on the table, the two boys following along with things in hand as well, the little black kitten trying to catch the torn hem of Walter’s pants.

Will wandered his way over to the table, taking a seat next to Molly, but on the very outside of the group. Molly had always been better with gatherings anyways. She would most likely hold up the conversation, though it would be more for looks than for protecting Will from the situations he didn’t want to deal with. She wasn’t going to protect him anymore.

Something unsettled Will as he glanced over the food that was set out and people were dishing themselves from. It was familiar, something he was sure he had eaten before, though he couldn’t exactly place it.

Jordan must have caught his expression because the man spoke up. “Lomo Saltado.” Will shook his head before looking up to the man who wore a kind smile, the words more so familiar to Will. “It is a blend of Asian and Peruvian flavors from Chinese migrants working in the mines in Peru.”

Will gave a small forced smile through a headache that was begging to set in and silently excused himself for the bathroom, which Casey directed him to. Once safe inside with the door locked, Will exhaled, hands going to the counter to hold himself upright.

"I provide the ingredients," Will said as he pulled a parcel of meat, some tomatoes and other items from a shopping bag, setting them on the kitchen island in front of a man dressed in a black suit. "You tell me what we should do with them."

"What's the meat?" the man asked, pulling off his suit coat.

Will simply pushed the brown paper parcel over to the taller man, eyes staying down on the counter. "What do you think?" he questioned, voice darker than normal.

Hannibal, that's who it must have been, looked at Will for a long moment before taking hold of the package and pulling at the string that kept it closed. He carefully pushed open the brown paper and looked over the single cut of pink meat for a moment. "Veal?" Will didn't reply, but he could hear Hannibal inhaling deeply, trying to get a good scent of the item. "Pork, perhaps?" He rolled up his shirt sleeves.

Will's head tipped to the side as he thought about his carefully worded answer, not wanting to admit anything outright. That was their game. Half truths, words masked away under double meanings, saying one thing and meaning another .

"She was a slim and delicate pig," Will finally settled on, the words slow as they left his mouth.

Hannibal was silent for a moment in thought before he finally spoke up. "I'll make you lomo saltado." The older man gave a quick smile across his tight lips, moving the meat to another part of the counter so that he could grab his knife block and push it towards Will. "We will make it together." Hannibal pulled free a rather large knife, holding it out towards Will, blade in hand with handle extended. "You slice the ginger ."

It was a horrid joke, one that made Will feel sick to his stomach, but he had to play along. He knew the rules to this game, knew where he needed to move to get a checkmate .

His hand slowly reached out, taking the knife. It was so clean that Will could see his reflection staring straight back at him in the blade.

A symphony played lightly as Hannibal set the plates of food down in front of Will and then himself, ever the gracious host, allowing Will to take the first bite before he partook with a barely there smile. Will waited patiently, watching the doctor eat, not saying a word, letting the man break the silence.

"The meat has an interesting flavor," he finally stated, looking thoughtful as he ate. So innocent. "It's brazing. Notes of citrus."

"My palate isn't as refined as yours," Will said, voice soft, not wanting to be above the music and break the gentle spell that was over the room.

Hannibal looked down at his plate, readying another bite. "Apart from humane considerations, it's more flavorful for animals to be stress-free prior to slaughter." Will watched as Hannibal took another bite, face still just as innocently blank, maybe a hint of distaste on his features. "This animal tastes frightened."

Will did his best to keep his face blank, knowing exactly how Hannibal knew, but not wanting to make it seem like he was fighting an internal war in his chest. "What does 'frightened' taste like?" Will questioned as he placed another bite into his mouth, not able to taste what Hannibal was finding.

"It's acidic."

"The meat is bitter about being dead."

Will could sense the amusement from Hannibal at the ill joke . Will gave the man a smile and Hannibal returned it. The man quickly dropped his smile, pushing the conversation further forward. "This meat is not pork." It was a fact, nothing more, nothing less.

Will inhaled deeply, knowing that he had to give something more. This push and pull that was theirs. "It's long pig."

Hannibal tilted his head up to look up at Will a little more before silently going back in his food, the conversation now at an end much to Will's relief. Will picked up his glass of wine and brought it to his lips, but lowered it, the silence suddenly unbearably uncomfortable.

"You can't reduce me to ..." Will trailed off at a flash of red eyes from behind a wine glass. "A set of influences. I'm not the product of anything." Why did he have to explain himself? Hannibal could read him just fine. He didn't need to try to give reasons to what he did. "I've given up good and evil for behaviorism." With that, Will finally took a sip of his wine, watching Hannibal's face carefully for any emotion.

"Then you can't say that I'm evil," Hannibal finally said.

That made Will's brows furrow curiously, but he quickly pushed the expression away for his blank one again. "You're destructive." No reaction. "Same thing." It was nearly a question, as if searching for approval for his lack at higher education.

"Evil is just destructive?" Hannibal questioned clinically. "Storms are evil, if it's that simple." Hannibal adjusted himself in his seat microscopically, Will sure he was only able to catch it because of how much attention was being put on Hannibal. "And we have fire, and then there's hail. Underwriters lump it all under 'Acts of God.' Is this meal an act of God, Will ?"

Will couldn't find it in himself to answer and instead filled his mouth with another bite so that he wouldn't have to speak.

Will gasped, meeting his own eyes in the mirror, bloodshot. He turned on the sink as cold as he could make it, removed his glasses, and filled his hands up to splash his face with the water and then over the back of his neck, feeling unbearably hot in his tie. He pulled at it and then unbuttoned the top few buttons, breathing hard.

He pulled a bottle of aspirin from his pocket and dry swallowed three pills, vision blurred from the light above him, head pounding as the memory replayed again, Will trying to see through the dark dining room to the man who sat across from him, still ever in shadow so Will could only see the bare minimum of him. Silvering hair, sharp features, those blood stained eyes that Will wondered if they had always been red or had slowly become red from the lives he had taken.

That accent was still comforting, even though now Will knew the truth behind it. It belonged to a killer, so why did Will feel at home when the voice spoke? There was something so gentle behind the harshness, a gentleness that in all of the fragments of memories Will had, was only used when Hannibal spoke directly to him. No one else was given the same courtesy that Will was and he couldn't help but feel oddly special.

With a deep breath and a dry face, tie and shirt fixed and presentable, and glasses once more on the bridge of his nose, Will left the bathroom and made his way back through the house until he found his way into the dinning room where everyone was chatting happily as Jordan cleaned up.

"This weekend we're going away on a trip," Casey said. "We're going to visit some old friends."

"Their four children are the loveliest dears," Jordan added, arms loaded with dishes. "We were wondering if Walter would like to come with us." Will stopped as Jordan turned around and nearly collided with Will. "Sorry," Jordan excused. "I left some food for you at your setting."

"Thank you," Will muttered, reaching out and taking several of the dishes that the man held, following him into the kitchen. He set things down by the sink and stepped back for Jordan to go retrieve more dishes. Will followed.

"Would you like to go?" Molly asked, eyes focused completely on Walter.

"Yes!" Walter said excitedly, causing Will to frown, but Molly didn't pay him any mind.

"That's settled then," Casey said as Jordan loaded up Will with more dishes to take back to the kitchen.

Will set them beside the others and took a deep breath, trying to gain control over the night back even just the slightest bit.

"You don't look too pleased," Jordan commented as he began washing dishes.

"I just have a lot on my mind," Will muttered, hand running through his curls. "Work never seems to stop."

Jordan glanced up curiously at that before looking back down at the plate he was washing. "I'm sure it's a difficult thing to do. I know I couldn't do anything in law. I don't have the stomach for blood."

Will leaned against the counter, pulling off his glasses curiously. "Really? You don't strike me as the type-"

"My husbands the one that's into the macabre, not me." Jordan gave a small laugh. "I about passed out when Daniel scraped his knee the other day. Casey is the one who has to deal with those types of things. But enough about me, I am interested in you, Will."

“What would you like to know?” Will questioned, unsure where this conversation was going.

“Casey is a little obsessed with Tattle-Crime,” Jordan explained.

“Tasteless tabloid,” Will grumbled.

“I hope this doesn't make me sound unconventional, but I read up on you. I wanted to know about the trial.”

“My trail?” Will inhaled deeply, a hand rubbing at his chin. “Uh....”

“You seemed surprised the other night at dinner about it,” Jordan continued, placing the last plate on the drying rack and turning off the sink. “At first I just thought it was the question that had you caught off guard, but the more I thought about it, the more it seemed like you didn’t know what Casey was talking about.”

Jordan turned around, wiping his hands off on a dish towel before quickly pulling down his sleeves once more. He folded his arms and leaned back against the counter, eyes expectantly on Will who was struggling with something to say.

“I-I-I...” Will quickly went about cleaning his glasses on his shirt to avoid having to look at Jordan. “I was attacked while working a case. I hit my head and I have some rather large-rather large memory gaps.” Will frowned at the poor explanation and slid his glasses back onto his nose. “It was a bit of a shock. I still don’t really remember the trail. Just the files that I read on it.”

Jordan gave an understanding nod with a kind smile. “You do not need to explain any more to me,” he said decisively. “Would you like to help me with dessert instead?”

The rest of the night was smooth, as smooth as Will could hope for. Feeling drained by the time they were finally saying good night was an understatement, Will’s battery in massive need of a charge. Whether that was with a chance to be alone, a few drinks or sleeping was Will’s guess, but the three didn’t seem too bad to do together.

The door was shut with the family behind it and Walter was in the car before Will sighed into the awkward silence of the wintery night, hands in his pockets, unsure what to do at this moment in time.

“You haven’t said anything about the trip,” Molly pointed out, keys in her hand, breath floating away into the night.

“He is not my son,” Will reminded, voice nearly as cold as it was outside. He sighed at the harshness and closed his eyes, mentally scolding himself. “I did not believe that I had a say.”

“You don’t,” Molly answered with a nod. “But I still respect your opinion, Will.”

“I don’t want Walter going,” Will said firmly, eyes going back to the large house that made his home look like a dollhouse.

“Will,” Molly sighed, rubbing at the bridge of her nose. “They’re not killers.”

“I know, they had a cat.” Will’s tone was annoyed as if he still couldn’t seem to let go of Casey and Jordan as suspects. And he couldn’t. Something at the back of his head was nagging at him that these weren’t the people that they showed the world. They wore person suits just like Hannibal did, just like he did. “That doesn’t mean that I’m comfortable with them looking after Walter for a weekend.”

Molly gave a nod. “I will take that into consideration.” She glanced back at Walter who sat in the car, watching them speak with curious eyes. “I need to get him home. It’s late.”

“Alright,” Will muttered, not fighting in the slightest. He knew he wouldn’t win. Molly wouldn’t let him win in any of these fights and if he was honest, he was too tired at the moment to try.

“Good night Will.”

“Night,” he whispered, stepping away from her car and making his way to his own, fishing his car keys from his pocket with frozen fingers.

Will didn’t go home though. Instead, he found himself going the opposite way down roads that all held a spark of familiarity to them, but nothing that Will consciously could remember. Nearly an hour of freeways and small towns later, he found himself entering Baltimore, unsure what had drawn him here.

His chest was tight with a tugging feeling that only seemed to grow strong the closer he got to one of the suburbs of the city. The car came to a stop outside of a large brick house that was several stories tall with multiple windows that were all dark, one of the top ones smashed out with plywood over it.

Will climbed from the car and went to the front steps that were blocked off by police tape. It was old and faded, no one having cared to take it down once they were done processing whatever crime scene this was.

Will tore at it until he could step up onto the porch where a dark stain was and turned the door handle, ready for it to be locked, but was pleasantly shocked when the door swung open. He slowly stepped into the house, letting the door shut behind him as he pulled a small flashlight from his pocket to better see.

The house was stripped clean, only the bulky furniture left, giving the space a rather open feeling. Will’s feet carried him, knowing the house instantly while his mind struggled to find where his feet were carrying him. The kitchen was first. Large, expensive, top of the line stainless steel.

The warm scent of freshly made coffee filled every breath that Will took, the smell intoxicating as he drank it in. He could almost hear the odd scientific machine with metal and glass pieces that was made in Belgium or something of the sorts, pressing the coffee.

“Never apologize for coming to me. Office hours are for patients. My kitchen is always open to friends.”

Will’s fingers ran over the kitchen counter as he inhaled once more of the coffee that warmed his insides that were still cold from the winter. He finally knew where he was. Knew why he knew this place. Knew why it felt like a long forgotten dream. This was Hannibal’s house, something so screwed up in the way that it comforted Will to be in this kitchen when he knew there would be blood stained into the floor. His own blood mixed with Jack’s and Abigail’s.

Not only his own and his friends, but dozens of others, their screams forever trapped in these walls, and for some reason Will couldn’t find it in himself to care, unsure why he was so forgiving towards this monster of a man that he couldn't remember. And maybe that was why he was being so forgiving. He couldn't remember enough to condemn the man, though his crimes should have been more than enough.

Maybe it was that gentleness. Always so gentle.

He pushed on from the kitchen, wandering through other doors until he came upon a once more recognized room that his feet were drawn to immediately. The space was massively large, stripped bare of everything save for a large wooden desk in front of a fireplace.

Around the room, needing a ladder to reach, were rows upon rows of empty bookshelves that lined each and every wall. Will closed his eyes for a moment, digging deep and breathed out through his nose.

The fire crackled and gave off a pleasant heat. There was the smell of old books full of unobtainable knowledge strong in the air. The scratch of a pencil, one that had drawn Achilles Lamenting the Death of Patroclus and the Primavera with a skill that Will could never possibly master. The faint fruitiness of a glass of wine.

His eyes opened and he found himself in the dark, cold office space, flashlight the only thing to see by, breath hanging deadly in the air with no movement.

"I feel like I've dragged you into my world."

"I got here on my own. But I appreciate the company."

Will's eyes flickered over the room once more as he found himself at the desk, fingers pressing into the icy wooden top. He stepped around it, this place of manipulation, and found himself looking through the drawers of the desk, stopped when there was actually something in one of them. He pulled it free and stared at it, eyes following the line of the body that was drawn. His body, nude and very much exaggerated from what Will felt was accurate.

Had he posed for this? There was no way he had. He could barely get undressed in front of or for Molly on certain days back when they were happily together. He didn't even want to think about what that would be like now. But maybe Hannibal was different. The man was so different, Will could recall that much. Hannibal was as unique as he had claimed Will to be.

It almost pained Will to crease the paper, but he carefully folded it up and shoved it into his coat pocket, leaving the office to once more collect dust with no one there to care for it anymore.

Will wandered the house a bit more until he found a staircase and started up it, hesitantly, unsure what was calling to him at the top of the steps. He had never been through this part of the house before, he could tell in the way his feet were tentative and didn't just take to the floor like they had in the lower level of the house.

Will carefully pushed open a door that seemed to call to him a little more than the other doors in the long hallway and found the room empty save for the dark and rich wall coloring, wine red curtains and a large king sized bed.

Will nearly didn't enter the room, almost feeling like he would be intruding on a piece of Hannibal that didn't belong to Will, but his feet led him into the room and he walked over to the bed, once more reaching out to feel at the limited items that were in the house.

The fabric of the mattress was soft against Will's rough fingers, a tiredness pulling at his limbs. He sat down on the bed and rested back on it, eyes closed, allowing the plushness of the mattress, that was far more expensive than what Will wanted to think about, to drag him further down.

"Get comfortable, mon cher," Hannibal's voice instructed softly, making Will sigh into the cold night air.

Maybe it was the crispness of the chill in the air or maybe Hannibal's room had always smelt of a forest. Something earthy, wild and ancient. Damp moss, rain, wet tree trunks, flowers, and needle-covered paths. A tree stump that was already creating new life, or even snow, frost, and softwood and still clinging from the office, wine and old books... Home.

And he was missing home. He was missing the phantom comfort that came from this man that he wished he knew more about, but was certain he missed Will as much as Will missed him. How did you miss someone you didn't know?

"Dad," a softer voice said. Will immediately placed it as Abigail's but he didn't open his eyes. "Please remember. We both miss you."

Will sat up and rubbed at his face. The problem was he did know the man, the murderer, the beast. He just didn't remember him. Will still didn't have a face, though he was certain he knew exactly who was the one haunting all of his dreams. He was positive that it was the man that was with Alana and Margot.

Will's face scrunched up and he pulled his phone from his pocket, thinking of calling the woman, but stopping at the time. Nearly two in the morning. How long had he been out? He would have to ask tomorrow, for now he was tired and cold and still needed that drink.

"Look who's up," Margot taunted as Hannibal made his way into the dining room for breakfast, a spread set out on the table. "And you got dressed!" There was mock approval in her tone that Hannibal knew was hiding her discomfort in Hannibal finally being able to function smoother. "No tie?"

"Still a little much for me," Hannibal answered, carefully stepping to the table, crutches still holding most of his weight even though now both feet were on the floor. Hannibal was now on instructions that he could put pressure on his knee, but he still had to use his crutches for another week or so and then he could switch to one crutch once Liam approved. "No Morgan?"

The room was oddly silent without the child and the dog at the table, though it was probably healthier for the dog. Morgan enjoyed feeding the dog under the table, which surprisingly neither Margot nor Alana had caught, but Hannibal had. The child reminded him of Will in a way. The innocence and the tilted perspective on the world, not to mention the love of animals. Morgan was dragging Hannibal out to the stables every chance he could so that they could pet the horses.

Hannibal didn't wholly mind, aside from the fact that he had to try to maneuver snow and ice with his medical drawbacks. The stables were well kept and more often than not, Margot would take the boy out on a ride and let Hannibal stay behind to feed the horses in a pleasant silence that he didn't often get at the house unless he stayed bound to his room.

"He had an early class this morning," Alana answered, sipping on a cup of coffee with a tablet in her hand, reading. "Have you read Freddie's new article?"

“I haven’t had the misfortune,” Hannibal answered, lowering himself into a chair and rolling up the sleeves of his blue dress shirt.

“It’s about Will,” Alana offered with a hint of playfulness in her voice that Hannibal did his best to ignore.

“She can never seem to let that train of thought be put to rest, can she?” Hannibal poured himself a glass of coffee with just a light amount of cream and took a sip before reaching out to a piece of toast and buttering it.

“It’s not about you,” Alana clarified, calling Hannibal’s eyes to her face that wore a smile on it.

Hannibal frowned with a deep breath. “What about Will?”

“He’s working another case for Jack,” was Margot’s answer through a small mouthful of parfait.

Alana watched curiously as Hannibal’s expression went from concerned to disapproving to blank. “It’s only natural that he would go back to work,” Hannibal said, voice calm and flat as he took another sip of his coffee. Alana watched in silence and when he didn’t speak again, she prompted an answer from him by reading aloud.

“Will Graham, the FBI’s mentally incompetent perfect sniffer dog, has pointed in a new direction with a dark twist. Local authorities have concluded that according to Not-so-Special-Agent Graham the recent string of murders are being performed by a religious sector who believes that witches are trying to take over the world. According to-”

“Thank you, Alana,” Hannibal muttered, eyes on the table. “She always has a way with words, doesn't she?” He would have to read the article later. The idea of witches struck him as interesting and he was out of things to read in this house, the library nowhere near what his had been.

“Why is she still alive, Hannibal?” Margot questioned as she rose to her feet, straightening out her riding jacket. It was still clean so she must have been planning to leave after breakfast. “She seems the type to be at the top of your list.”

“The timing wasn’t correct,” Hannibal confirmed, eyes bright as they met Margot’s as if he had been planning Freddie’s death for many years now and had just figured out exactly what to do with her, which he probably had in all honesty. Margot wouldn’t put it past Hannibal to not lay a finger on anyone unless the perfect statement could be made. “It would have been too suspicious.”

“And what would you do to her?” Margot questioned, causing Alana to sigh disapprovingly. Hannibal’s eyebrows rose at the inquiry and he gave a smile, showing his sharp, crooked teeth before quickly hiding them away again. “Would she be draped in undeveloped rolls of film, the images ruined forever so that she couldn’t use them even if she were alive? Would her curls be a halo around her head, or the fire in your own painting? And what meal would you make from her?”

Hannibal hummed in amusement, finishing off his piece of toast before wiping his hands on a towel. He swallowed before turning his attention back to Margot who waited for an answer. “A very poetic idea, though I hate to admit it hasn’t occurred to me in which fashion I would display her body, though that might make my day a little less dull. As for the dish, possibly Turkish liver meatballs with Paleo Cacik. Something much lighter to contrast the heaviness she adds to the world.”

There was a small smile from Margot before she excused herself, leaving Hannibal and Alana alone. Alana wore a displeased expression at the conversation that had taken place, still ever wanting to be the moral high ground despite the fact that Hannibal knew all of her secrets. Her hands weren't as clean from blood as she liked to believe they were.

"You don't approve of Will working again, do you?" Alana finally asked, rising from her own chair and waving some staff to come and start clearing away the breakfast, leaving Hannibal only a moment to fix a plate for himself before it was whisked away much to his dislike.

"I approve of him doing a task that is normal for him to be doing, I do not approve of Jack Crawford's tactics in manipulating him to accomplish said tasks," Hannibal explained as he ate a forkful of eggs.

The dining room door opened, but Hannibal ignored it, sure it would just be Morgan wanting him to do something, Hannibal now the boy's favorite plaything, but a small hand tugging at his vest didn't come. Instead Alana stepped around the table, heading for the door.

"I found him straggling around the parlor," Margot's entertained voice said.

"Will," Alana greeted in a voice far happier than Hannibal felt it should have been. "I forgot that you were coming by today." Hannibal's hands froze, not sure if he wanted to look up and play part in another cruel joke that was being played on him. "I will go grab that book you wanted."

That caught Hannibal's attention. He didn't know the empath to care much for reading unless they were nightmarish details of cases he was working. He glanced up to see Will nod with a small smile, curls bouncing lightly.

"You can wait here if you would like," Alana offered, Margot leaving the room and Alana following after her.

The door closed and Hannibal nearly stopped breathing as those blue eyes that brought color back to his sky landed on him. There was a smile on Will's lips that Hannibal couldn't exactly place and the man didn't seem at all nervous about walking over to the table and taking the seat across from Hannibal's.

Hannibal lowered his fork to the table and did his best to ignore the eyes that flickered over him, detailing him in a scrutiny that Hannibal had never been under before from the man. Whatever conclusion Will came up with, it was in Hannibal's favor because the smile never dropped.

"You look better today," Will commented, reaching across the table and pouring himself his own cup of coffee. Will's fingers brushed against Hannibal's hand as he reached for Hannibal's spoon and Hannibal couldn't help but feel like the man had made the move on purpose. Will put in a single spoonful of sugar into his cup and stirred it. "Do you normally wear such formal things to breakfast?"

Hannibal found it difficult to produce an answer, the fleeting feeling of Will's fingers against his something that he wanted to hold onto now that he had felt it again. His mouth was dry and he cleared his throat, unable to stop the small bloom of hope in his chest that maybe Will had remembered. Will was being far more forward than their previous encounter, but he kept his face so happily blank that Hannibal didn't have a hope of reading him.

"Cleanliness is next to godliness," was Hannibal's answer.

Will gave a small snort as he took a sip of his coffee, dark and sweet. "You are not a God, we both know that," he said with a confidence that only pulled on that thread of a hope a little more. "You prefer to defy God." Will watched as Hannibal's expression turned to one of pure marvel. "I'm afraid I have an empathy disorder that usually disturbs most people, but I'm nearly positive you already know that."

What game was he playing?

Hannibal inhaled deeply and lifted another forkful of eggs to his mouth, frowning at how they had grown cold. He pushed his plate aside and folded his arms on the table, eyes tight on Will, who seemed more distracted by something else.

"What happened to your wrists?" he asked, his confidence not as bold now. Or maybe it was. Will held out his hand across the table, palm up, more demanding permission than asking for it. But that didn't bother Hannibal. Will was never a bother. Hannibal simply extended a single hand across the table and let Will grasp it, pulling Hannibal closer, now leaning against the edge of the table and trying to ignore the discomfort in his torso from the off angle. "What happened?"

"A gift from a friend, *gudrus berniukas*," Hannibal replied softly, trying not to pull away at the feather light touches of Will's fingers over the long gash in his wrist. Will didn't remember, Hannibal decided on. There was something that Will remembered, or he wouldn't be so outright with Hannibal, but it wasn't their relationship, not in any aspect that Hannibal wanted it to be remembered.

"What does that mean?" Will asked softly, not releasing Hannibal's hand as blue met merlot. Hannibal gave a small smile and shook his head, not answering. Will frowned at the silence and Hannibal felt his heart swell lightly as the dislike covered the man's features, though Will's hands still traced the scarring on his wrist.

"*Eina kaip žemę pardavęs,*" Hannibal muttered thoughtfully, causing Will to bite at his bottom lip, with blue eyes fluttering shut. Hannibal wanted to chuckle as he watched the shiver run through Will, Will still sensitive to hearing the foreign languages, though he held the reaction back, not wanting to scare Will away.

"What did that mean?" Will's eyes opened again, but this time avoided Hannibal's gaze.

"I believe it translates to, walking like he sold the earth. It means that one is sad," Hannibal answered, taking pity on the boy. Will slowly pulled his hands away from Hannibal's and Hannibal straightened up in his chair, lightly adjusting himself so that his middle wasn't in as much pain. "Are you sad, Will?"

"Empty," Will replied, sitting back in his chair, letting the familiarity of this conversation wash over him. Not that he had had it before, but the push and pull between the two of them was comforting in a way. "Been feeling empty for a long time. I'm hoping that the book Alana gives me will help."

"A medical text?" Hannibal questioned in a newfound interest.

"I suppose you could call it that," Will replied with a nod.

Will rose from his chair and Hannibal watched as he stepped around to his side of the table, hand taking the back of the chair behind Hannibal's head. Hannibal leaned back, hitting the back of the chair, unable to move any further away from Will as Will leaned in close enough that Hannibal was sure the empath could hear his heartbeat.

Hannibal's eyes dropped to Will's other hand that was firm on the edge of the table, finger missing a golden band. What had happened to Molly? Because even when they had been together, Will still kept that ring upon his finger. Even when they had... That ring was still worn proud on Will's finger, the only thing Will had been wearing.

Will's breath was hot at Hannibal's ear. "I know your secret, Dr. Lecter," he whispered, waiting for a reaction from the man.

He needed to know if he was right. He needed to know if this was the man that he couldn't remember. He needed to put a face to the voice that swirled nearly endlessly in Will's mind. And this was the face he hoped was related to the voice in his mind. Will was more than certain that the accent was the same.

When no reaction came, no flinch, no hitch of breath, just dirty red eyes flickering up to meet Will's gaze, Will continued in just as low of a whisper. "When were you going to kill me, Chesapeake Ripper? Were you going to eat my heart too? Was I going to be a sickly sweet dessert?"

"You were always a main course, Will."

Will was taken aback by the sudden admission and he pulled back slightly, eyebrows furrowed to find a rather tranquil expression on the older man's face. Will's eyes dipped over every inch of Hannibal's face, taking in each line as if he could find a lie in it, as if this man were playing him like a harpsichord.

Hannibal played the harpsichord.

Will winced as the realization made its presence known with a sharp thud in his skull with the light tinkling of keys plucking strings.

"Still suffering from migraines?" Hannibal asked softly, a hand reaching up but quickly faltering and dropping back to his side.

Will licked at his lips. "You're not afraid that I know?" he asked.

"Should I be?"

Will was silent, unsure what to make of the turn the conversation had made. A battle was raging deep inside of himself, one of doing the right thing and one of doing nothing at all and he found himself leaning more towards not following up his earlier threats, though he couldn't place why he would. Will gave a small shake of his head, muttering a barely audible *no* and caught the slight twitch of Hannibal's lips into a smile, that was quickly wiped away before it could grow into something more.

"You know who I am now, Will. What are you going to do with that information?" Hannibal questioned, curiosity pulling at him. How much did Will remember? How much could Hannibal push this before the man broke? Will, despite the spike in confidence, still radiated unbalance.

“Remember.” Hannibal blinked several times, opening his mouth to speak, but Will cut him off. “I want to remember everything. I am going to find a way to remember everything.”

“I’m sure you will,” Hannibal muttered quietly, now enjoying their closeness. “You’re such a cunning boy.”

Will tipped his head to the side at the words, a far off echo somewhere in the back of his mind that he would have to explore more later. “Jack Crawford said we were close.” Hannibal hummed in agreement. “How close were we?”

“Intimately.”

Will’s fingers tapped at the back of Hannibal’s chair as he mused over the word given to him, trying to take in every possible angle it had. And it had many. Acquaintanceship, friendship, something private and personal, and sexual was always a possibility, but Will wasn’t exactly sure to which Hannibal was referring.

“My relationship with Hannibal is not as passionate as yours. You are here visiting an old flame. Is your wife aware of how intimately you and Hannibal know each other?”

Will could only stare at Hannibal as those words shook his whole foundation, stealing his breath away from him. Flashes of his dream came to him like a snapshot of a camera. Hungry lips, starving fingers, loose ties, white lies, words that pushed them from grace, a place where Will fell so very hard into hallelujah.

The question left Will’s lips before he could stop it, barely above a whisper as a red thread pulled Will closer to the killer in the chair below him. “Intimately?”

“Exceptionally,” Hannibal answered, voice just as soft, worried of shattering the fragile air between them. An air that he had desperately missed that was always saturated with the scent of petrichor.

Will’s lips were smothering as they brushed just over Hannibal’s, nowhere near close enough to make contact, just a flutter of butterfly wings. It took everything in Hannibal not to move, every ounce of strength he had to give to stay still, more control than he had ever used in any other aspect in his life to not ruin this moment.

“What vintage wine do your lips taste like?”

Hannibal was about to close the space between them, his command over his body spent, but stopped at a flicker of movement, something rougher than Will’s lips lightly pressed to his. He inhaled, startled and slowly reached up to take the paper that Will had placed between them with a smirk. Will pushed himself from the chair and straightened his shirt nonchalantly as if nothing had happened.

Hannibal pushed down a small flash of betrayal at what might as well have been Judas’ kiss. With slightly trembling fingers, Hannibal unfolded the paper that he recognized as something he would use to sketch on. His eyes fell on one of his sketches from many years ago. One that Hannibal had drawn during a therapy session, one of the many where Will would nearly waste their whole hour with a single stance and a silence with blank eyes. Hannibal had simply used his imagination to strip the man bare to capture the art, though Will’s body put his drawing to shame.

The dining room door opened and Hannibal glanced up, licking his lips as Alana stepped back in, a black leather notebook in her hand. “I’m sorry. I thought it was in my study. Turns out Margot borrowed it,” Alana excused, though Hannibal knew better. She had left on purpose. Allowed Will here on purpose. Spent so long away on purpose. All to get a row out of him.

Hannibal glanced back down at the sketch and couldn’t stop the thought that Will had been back in his house. When had Will gone? What else had Will found? Was there much of anything left for Will to find?

Hannibal looked up as Will took the book from Alana’s hand with a polite thank you and a promise to return it as soon as he was done with it.

With strong steps, he made his way back to Hannibal, who looked a little numb, much to Will’s mirth. He leaned back over Hannibal, lips once more at Hannibal’s ear. “Were we ever that intimate?” His finger tapped at the paper in Hannibal’s hands as he straightened himself, turned away from Hannibal, book in hand and a nod at Alana with an assurance that he could show himself out.

Chapter End Notes

Ukochany- Beloved
mon cher-my dear
gudrus berniukas- cute boy
Eina kaip žemę pardavęs-walking like he sold the earth

Also yes. I know Hannibal's office and home are separate. Haha.

Thanks again to my wonderful beta, @PitaGonzalezMe on twitter.

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

> “Will, you must eat. You’ve lost weight.”
> Will’s fingers trailed the rim of his wine glass, feeling small at the chiding, nearly about to ask how Hannibal knew, but a different set of words left his lips instead. “I haven’t had anyone to cook and force me to eat.”

Chapter Notes

> I guess these were the songs I had going through my mind when I wrote this chapter. Been kinda wanting to base a Hannigram fic off of the music video for Addicted To You, but not sure.
>
> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qc9c12q3mrc
> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlEQnZdlaeE
> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrDzd4ufypE

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Losing
You
Terrifies
Me

“That man came by again,” Morgan announced matter-of-factly, holding out a carrot for a horse to nibble on. He gave a small laugh as the carrot was pulled from his hand, the horse's lips feeling at the boy's fingers.

"So he did," Hannibal muttered, adjusting himself on his crutches and pulling his gloves from his sweating hands.

"Did he remember?"

Hannibal shoved his gloves into his coat pocket as he regarded the young boy who had somehow snuck yet another carrot out of his jacket sleeve, holding it out to the next horse in the gate over. "In some aspects," Hannibal answered after a moment of loud carrot munching. "Not enough to make a difference."

"He took that book that mommy was reading." Morgan patted the horse's nose and stumbled back slightly as the horse pushed at him. In a natural reaction, Hannibal used a single crutch to reach out and balance the boy before returning it to the ground. "Thanks, Hanni."

The smile he gave Hannibal made the man shift uncomfortably. Not even Abigail had ever looked at him like that. He wasn't exactly sure what to call the expression, but it bordered on attachment and fondness.

"You're welcome," the man muttered, begging for anything to take the kid's eyes from him.

"My mommy said that you wrote in that book." Morgan's attention turned back to the horse and he scooped up some hay from the floor to hold out to the horse. "That maybe it would help the man remember."

Hannibal was quiet as he thought about that undeniably interesting morning. In his shock, Hannibal had managed to miss the details that he normally would have held onto. He focused on the little black book that had been in Will's hand and realized it was his own notes. Notes that he had kept from Will because his mind always seemed to catch fire when he read them.

The world shattered down around Will, memories crashing back in with a vengeance, wanting to be front and center for being pushed aside for so long. It never failed. The only time Will hadn't fallen into disrepair had been this very last time. Though, he had only read a small selection instead of the entirety of the notebook. It was possible that there was a bit of weight in that, though Hannibal wasn't sure how much there was.

Maybe Will's mind would stay intact this time. Or Hannibal hoped that Molly was observant enough to know that Will would need all resources to protect him, help him through the fevered nightmares that were bound to come for him.

Hannibal sincerely hoped that Will wouldn't do anything reckless if he did remember. There were bound to be bouts of violence, sickness, nightmares that would drive the empath to absolute insomnia. Each were extreme in their infliction, swallowing Will in their entirety until Will couldn't handle it any longer and shut down.

Hannibal gave a deep sigh, pinching the bridge of his nose. Hannibal would need to ask Alana to keep an eye on Will for him. Will wouldn't have removed his ring without there being a serious issue. Molly was no longer in the picture, whether by her own choice or by Will's, Hannibal was left to guess, but he was leaning towards Molly having either kicked Will out or left.

"Morgan," Margot's voice called from the entrance of the stable. "Are you ready for your lesson?"

“Yep!” Morgan answered, skipping towards his mom, kicking up dust from the hay and causing Hannibal to nearly sneeze. “Bye Hanni.”

“Can you get back to the house alright?” Margot asked, more out of politeness than actually caring what happened to Hannibal.

“I will manage,” Hannibal replied with a dismissing nod.

Margot lifted Morgan up onto the horse and led them from the stable, back out into the snowy winter air, leaving Hannibal alone with the rest of the horses and his thoughts. Hannibal’s hand reached out and gently caressed one of the horses for a moment before he pulled his gloves from his pocket and slipped them back on, making his way from the stable.

He wasn’t exactly sure how else to beg Alana for more favors. He knew he was on borrowed time as it was, and he hadn’t been lying when he said he wasn’t going to keep his promise yet. He had no intention of killing Alana until the time demanded it. And it would demand it, but not for years to come. She had a son to take care of, a booming business and a wife to keep happy. It wasn’t her time yet.

But it would be his sooner rather than later. His time here was slowly expiring, the safety only going to last as long as his health was in bad shape. The moment he was able to walk without help, he knew he would be out the door, or possibly in the ground, and this home would be scrapped in search of another out of his grip.

Another gated community. Another family to be found just the same as the others. Children shot in the head, parents displayed with their stab wounds for all to see. The salt ring was a little easier to see in this crime scene and had actually contained a fair amount of the blood, the line thicker this time.

“Doesn’t this remind you of the weird case a few years back?” Price asked, taking a picture of the scene. “The one with the pentagrams?”

“Oh yeah,” Zeller answered with a smile, looking up from where he was kneeling by the children, carefully lifting up a band aid with a pair of tweezers. “The Pentagram Killer. Original, isn’t it?”

“I don’t remember a case with pentagrams,” Will muttered, stepping around the man and woman couple who were holding hands as if that could have saved them. Will knew better, but he was sure that it was a comfort for them in those last horrifying moments.

“It was before you started working cases with us,” Zeller explained.

“The killer would use the victim’s lipstick to draw pentagrams somewhere around his crime scene. Sometimes they were on the bodies, usually on the women who were assaulted, other times on mirrors or walls.” Price took another picture, Will letting him pass by.

“One of his victims he had sliced through her neck so deeply that she was nearly decapitated.” Zeller moved a finger across his throat and stuck out his tongue with a gagging noise that got him a dark look from Price. “Then stabbed her through the chest so hard that the knife was embedded in the floor. It was nearly impossible to pull it free.”

Will winced as the sound of wood being splintered by a knife filled his mind, giggling from a woman choking on her own blood, chained to the floor by a single movement.

“At the trial the guy said that the pentagram was to show his love of Satan and the sacrifices he had made for the devil,” Zeller continued in the story. Will listened closely, always interested in how the two friends liked to finish each other’s phrasing and wondering if they were together far more than they should be.

“The pentagram didn’t always symbolize Satan,” Will muttered, digging through old information, trying to push the picture of stabbing someone from his mind. “It used to be used in many religious circles as a way to represent Christ and how he gave himself up for the world.”

“Really?” Price asked curiously, catching Will off guard. Price was the one who normally had the odd facts of knowledge to share and it struck Will as odd that, considering what they did for a living, Price wouldn’t know the origins of a pentagram.

“It wasn’t until more recent years that the pentagram was associated with evil,” Will muttered, happy to be pulling this knowledge from a filing cabinet instead of other knowledge. “With Hollywood and with the rise in unaccepted pagan beliefs, the symbol was turned into something evil. But the only thing evil about it is when it is represented by the goat’s head. But even Satanists aren’t evil, they’re more atheist than evil. Though there are always cases of the extreme.”

“Does Satanism have something to do with the case?” came an irritated voice from behind Will, announcing that Jack had finally arrived at the crime scene.

“It was his calling card,” Will muttered, folding his arms over his chest and stepping aside for Jack to look over the mess on the floor. “Most serial killers have them and they are specific to them. The Chesapeake Ripper is in how he removes organs. They’re protected and surgically done to perfection. So what are these killer’s calling cards?”

“They’ve been lazy,” Beverly’s voice said through the contemplative silence. Will glanced up, adjusting his glasses slightly to see her across the way. “They have been missing things. The boys fight so often and now that I can’t keep them in line, they haven’t been paying attention.” Will looked around at Zeller and Price who were still working away and then back to Beverly, confused. “There’s something in her throat. Can’t you see it?”

Will’s eyes dropped down to the woman, looking over her throat, having missed the bulge there himself. He carefully stepped into the salt circle and did his best to stay out of the blood that was tacky and dark with age. He squatted down and with a gloved hand reached out to touch at the woman’s neck, feeling out something hard and sharp.

“Does anyone have tweezers?” Will asked, glancing around at his team and the other bodies that he didn’t care to try to recognize. Zeller passed a pair to Price who handed them to Will. Will opened the woman’s mouth and reached back until he could grab at the corner of whatever was in her throat. He pulled firmly, but carefully until it came free and found what looked like a folded up playing card.

Will carefully unfolded it and was met with the picture of a woman, sitting upon a throne with a crown upon her head, scepter in hand. “The Empress,” Will said, holding out the card to Jack who took it with a gloved hand, looking at both sides of it.

“A tarot card?” Zeller asked curiously, taking back the tweezer that Will held out.

“Have there been cards in the other victims?” Jack asked.

“We didn’t check,” Price answered. “Though I didn’t think a calling card would be so literal an expression.”

“Well, let’s make it a priority to check the other victims,” Jack said harshly, holding the card out for it to be dropped into an evidence bag that Zeller was holding open for Jack. “What does the card mean?”

“The Empress symbolizes motherhood, fertility, and nature,” Price explained, taking pictures of the card in the evidence bag that Zeller was tagging with an annoyed look at the bright flash that was assaulting him.

“Those don’t sound like bad things,” Zeller pointed out.

“Tarot cards have two sides to them,” Will said, standing back up and stepping out of the salt circle, pulling his gloves from his hands. “An upright meaning and a reversed meaning.”

“And what’s the reversed meaning, Will?” Jack pushed, hand taking Will’s shoulder strongly, keeping Will in place as if the empath were planning to run.

“It means dependence, smothering, emptiness. This woman probably shunned being a mother, depended on vices to keep her sane. She was smothering in her relationships, nothing able to satisfy the emptiness in her. She wasn’t happy enough with what she had been blessed with and made sure that the world knew she was unhappy.” Will rubbed at his eyes under his glasses. “She might have been suffering from a mental affliction. Possible borderline personality disorder. She wanted to make sure everyone knew she was the sickest person in the room. Probably upset the killer that she wasn’t grateful with what she had. She did win one of those dream home sweepstakes. She didn’t earn this, she won it. It makes the killers’ blood boil.”

“Why?”

“They probably came from a poor family,” Will replied, pulling himself free of Jack’s grip. “Or one of them did. They probably didn’t have food growing up, the father a drunk, the mother a flake. That might be another reason he lets his partner protect the children. Someone needs to protect them and he knows all too well what it feels like to not be protected.”

“Can you drop him off?” Molly's voice asked across the phone, causing Will to frown.

“So not only is he going away on a weekend trip that I do not approve of, now you want me to drop him off?” Will asked tiredly, hand rubbing at the back of his stiff neck as he leaned back in his chair as his desk. He had been going over slides for his next class, digging through crime scene photos to find the less brutal ones that still held enough decent detail in them to be helpful.

“Will,” Molly scolded with a sigh. “You said you still wanted to spend time with him and I need to go pick up my sister from the airport.”

“And your parents-”

“Are old, Will.” Molly’s voice was tight and Will bit at his lip. It wasn’t that he didn’t want to spend time with Walter, he really did. He wanted to be a good father figure if he couldn’t be a real father, but it was Molly who had him not wanting to go anywhere near the two of them. “I don’t have-”

“I can do it,” Will said, knowing he needed to make the best of the situation that he could. “I’m sorry. You just caught me off guard.”

“I know it’s been a while since we’ve spoken-”

“-A week?” Will challenged.

“-but your help would be appreciated. And Wally wants to see you,” Molly pushed, voice holding a forced lightness to it.

“Do you want to see me?” Will found himself asking, despite already knowing and not wanting to hear the answer.

“How’s work, Will?” Molly deflected. “I saw there was another one of those witch trials or whatever they’re being called.”

“They’re called the Witch Hunters, and yes. There was another attack.” Will closed his laptop and exhaled deeply. “Which is why I don’t want Walter out.”

“You mean you still just don’t like them.”

“I didn’t say that,” Will defended softly, knowing better than to raise his voice.

“You didn’t have to.”

“Just tell me when and where,” Will grumbled, a twisting feeling in his gut as he thought about what he was agreeing to. There was just something wrong that Will couldn’t put his finger on. Something that made it so Will couldn’t relax.

“Walter needs to be in Hershey tonight,” Molly answered. “He’ll be packed and ready to go once you're done with your classes.”

“Speaking of which,” Will said a little louder as students began to file through the open door, taking their seats among the stands. “I need to go. Will he be at your parent’s house?”

“Yes. I will let him know you are coming. Thank you, Will.”

“Of course, Molly.”

Will lowered his phone and shoved it into his pocket, getting from his seat and sliding his glasses back onto his nose. “Good afternoon class,” he announced loudly, calling the room to silence and all attention on him. “Today we are going to discuss the Pentagram Killer and what a calling card is.”

“And then we’re going to go skiing!” Walter said excitedly, nearly bouncing up and down in his seat.

Will smiled, eyes flickering down to his phone to check the map that was up once more. “That sounds like a lot of fun,” he commented, half invested in the conversion as he tried to drive and navigate an unfamiliar place at the same time.

“Dad?” Walter asked. Will hummed in answer, flicking on his turn indicator and getting into the lane for the exit he needed to take. “Dad?”

“What?” Will asked, looking over at Walter for a moment before turning back to the road. “You called me dad,” he noted with a small smile.

“Well, yeah. You’re my dad. Calling you Will felt weird. But don’t tell mom. She’s-”

“Trying to protect you,” Will interrupted kindly, giving Walter a sideways smile. “I won’t tell her.”

“I meant to give this to you, but I haven’t seen you in a while,” Walter continued, reaching into his backpack and pulling out a small wooden box. Will stole a look as the boy placed it on the dash, the moonlight highlighting the large crack on the lid and the way that clasp was bent and broken. “I’m really sorry dad.”

“I told you that it was fine. It wasn’t your fault,” Will assured kindly, reaching out a hand to ruffle Walter's hair. “Is that kid still beating you up?”

“Not as of late.” Will shot Walter a look that always seemed to loosen the boy's tongue, one that told Walter he knew better than to lie because Will would always find out. It was Will’s job to find things out that people didn’t want to know and he wasn’t about to give Walter a break. Will sighed, leaning back in his seat. “They’re just a jerk. It’s fine.”

“It’s not fine,” Will argued, a frown on his face as he stopped in front of another rather large house that he could never hope to afford, the map on his phone indicating that they had arrived at their destination. “Have you talked to your principal or your-”

“Mom said that-”

“I don’t care what your mother said,” Will stated strongly, putting the car in park and turning to face the young boy. “Your mother is a wonderful woman, but she does not like confrontation. You coming home with bruises on you is not ok and it needs to be dealt with.”

“Dad, I’m alright. Really,” the kid tried to convince.

“Walter.” Will’s tone was stern. “You have to stand up for yourself. You can’t let him do this to you again.”

“Him?” Walter asked, eyebrows furrowed.

Will felt a small smile crack across his lips. “Oh,” he said with a slight tease in his tone. “You like her.”

“Dad,” Walter groaned, head back against the seat.

“That’s still not ok for her to do. I’m going to talk to your mother about this.” Will turned off the car, opening his door. “Let’s get you settled in. Come on.” Will helped grab Walter’s bags and they made their way up to the house, Will knocking on the front door, listening to the sound of children playing inside. The door opened and Will gave Casey a smile. “Hey.”

“Hi Will,” Casey said happily. “Wally.”

“Hi, Mr. Mudgett,” Walter said with a smile.

“Come on!” Danny shoved his way past his father and took Walter’s hand, pulling the boy into the house and out of sight.

Casey gave a chuckle and reached out, taking the bags from Will’s hands. “Kids.”

Will gave a nod. “Thank you for watching him this weekend.”

“It’s no problem,” Casey assured with a grin. “He’s always welcome. He’s a good kid.”

“Yeah,” Will muttered, eyes going behind Casey to where Walter had disappeared. “He is.”

“What happened to your ring?” The question made Will stop and glance down at his hand as if he half expected the band to still be there. “Sorry,” Casey quickly added. “I watch too many true crime shows. I notice really small details now.” He gave another small laugh. “You don’t have to tell me.”

“Molly and I have been having some fights. We thought it best if we separated for the time being,” Will explained, unsure why he had to. Casey didn’t need to know. This was Will’s own problem. Some random man didn’t need to know.

Casey gave a small nod. “My wife did the same thing with me. Wanted space and then ran off with someone, leaving Danny with me.”

Will nodded awkwardly at the personal story he was getting, uncomfortable in the suddenly very sharp cold air. “And Danny was ok with Jordan?”

Casey gave a shrug. “It took him some time. I think the idea of two dad’s was a lot for him to wrap his mind around. But he loves Jordan and Jordan’s very good with him. Treats Danny like his own.” There was a small silence and Casey glanced behind himself as a hand rested on his hip, pulling one of the bags from Casey’s grip.

“Hello Will,” Jordan said with a smile, accent prominent. “Would you like to come in and meet our friends? Have a drink?”

“Oh, no,” Will said, hands up in mock surrender with a nervous smile. “I really need to be getting home. I have some more work to do.”

“No rest for the wicked, huh?” Casey teased.

“Their restlessness makes a weary FBI agent,” Will said with a nod, licking at his lips. “I appreciate the offer though,” he added quickly, hands on his hips, eyes trying to find somewhere to land.

“Perhaps another time then,” Jordan said with a small nod. “We will drop Walter off Sunday night, if that is alright with you.”

“That will be fine,” Will answered with a nod. “Thanks again.” He took a step backwards, pulling his keys from his pocket in an effort to dismiss himself.

“Night Will,” Casey called as Will started down the driveway.

“Night!”

With a deep breath, Will climbed back into his car and locked the doors He closed his eyes for a moment, willing his personal battery to recharge. It was going to be a long drive home. He wouldn't be back home for nearly another two hours. Maybe he should just get a hotel room and head back in the morning. And he hadn't eaten yet. He didn't really feel like eating much at the moment, his mind focused elsewhere. It was more a chore, something on a checklist than something he consciously thought about doing for his own benefit.

Alana and Margot were only about a twenty minute drive from here. Maybe they would be kind enough to play impromptu host, help him save a little bit of money, not that it needed saving. It was just natural to hide away every penny unless necessary, the destitute of his childhood forever tattooed into his mind, ready just in case he went hungry again.

Burying down his guilt, he pulled his car from the nice neighborhood and made his way across the state to find himself in another nice neighborhood, if one could call it that, the homes spaced out by acres of land.

Alana's was by far the largest in the cluster and was lit up brightly against the dark backdrop of night. He pulled up the gravel drive and parked the car, keys back in his pocket along with his hands as he made his way up to the home. He knocked on the glass front door, patiently waiting for a moment or two before a shape appeared through the frosted glass.

There seemed to be some form of fumbling on the other side before the door swung open and Will was surprisingly met with a pair of tired merlot eyes. There was a flutter of shock in those deep pools before it was wiped away just as quickly as it had come.

"Will?" the man asked, looking around Will's face curiously and then behind the man to his car. "What are you doing here?"

"I was nearby and thought I would stop to say hi," Will answered, head tipped curiously at who had answered the door. "Are they not home?"

Hannibal was silent for a moment before he licked as his lips, shaking his head. "They went out for the evening. I'm afraid I will be all you have as company if you would like to come in."

Will thought about the offer, trying to pick apart Hannibal's words to find their hidden meanings, but finding nothing other than the kind gesture he shook his head. "I don't want to impose."

"What they don't know won't hurt them," Hannibal insisted, opening the door a little wider and hobbling back, off balance from the use of a single crutch, both feet firmly on the floor. "Please come in out of the cold."

Will glanced back at his car for a moment and then up at the moon, before returning to Hannibal with a submitting sigh. He stepped into the house and Hannibal closed the door behind him.

"You're looking a little more formal than the last time we met, Doctor," Will commented, pulling his coat from him and hanging it up on the coat rack by the front door. He glanced over at the man who wore a full three piece suit, something in a dark blue with one of those horrid paisley ties that Will had only been guessing the man would wear. "Don't tell me you were expecting me."

"Hannibal, please. Formalities are not needed between us." There was a spark of amusement in the man's tone as he watched Will settle himself into the house.

“Us?” Will questioned, looking over the entryway in an attempt to not have to meet those piercing eyes. “Is there an us?”

“There doesn’t have to be an us,” Hannibal assured lightly. “Would you like a drink?”

“You are offering me a lot of things that aren’t yours to be offering,” Will pointed out, but he didn’t look opposed to the idea.

“You do not have to concern yourself with such thoughts.” Hannibal inhaled deeply and Will followed the slow pace Hannibal set, still leaning against the one crutch heavily.

“What did you do?” Will asked curiously, finding himself in a rather decently sized kitchen that looked about the size of Will’s main living area. He watched as Hannibal maneuvered around the kitchen with ease of having been in here many times prior.

“I was hit by a car. Had surgery to fix the tendons.” Hannibal paused at the wine rack, and Will waited at the kitchen island and bar with two wine glasses ready for whatever bottle Hannibal chose to produce. With one finally chosen and in hand, Hannibal poured them each a glass and Will watched as the man inhaled deeply before taking a thoughtful sip, savoring the drink as if it were the last thing he would ever taste. “I am on the better side of the incident though.”

Will gave a nod and took a small sip of his wine as well, unsure why the drink was starting to appeal to him more and more now. Before he couldn’t stand it, too dry or earthy tasting. It was complicated and Will really rather that he didn’t wake up with headaches, but now there was something comforting in a glass.

Will winced with a blush coming to his cheeks as his stomach growled loudly in the kitchen. His hand went to his stomach as if that could shush it and he could feel Hannibal’s eyes studying him carefully.

“Have you had dinner?” Hannibal asked after a moment. Will shook his head and Hannibal tutted at him. “Will, you must eat. You’ve lost weight.”

Will’s fingers trailed the rim of his wine glass, feeling small at the chiding, nearly about to ask how Hannibal knew, but a different set of words left his lips instead. “I haven’t had anyone to cook and force me to eat.”

Hannibal paused, a hand on the door handle of the fridge. Molly must have done all of the cooking. And if Will was working a case again, Hannibal knew all of his mind would be focused on that case and not on taking care of himself. That was just how Will Graham operated.

“We can’t have that, can we?” Hannibal asked lightly. “Would you like me to cook for you?”

“Can you manage that?” Will lifted his gaze from his wine glass to see Hannibal already digging through the fridge for items. “I don’t want you to hurt yourself.” The affection was so natural as it came out of his mouth, so easy. Something about this man made Will feel every emotion so deeply and completely that Will couldn’t understand why he didn’t remember. If each conversation was going to be this alight with life, where were the rest of them?

“I am injured, not handicapped,” Hannibal reminded, sending Will back to an apartment overlooking New York City. He was pulled from the thought as items were set on the counter.

"Though, if you would be my *sous chef*, I would very much appreciate it." His knee was becoming stiff and would need to be stretched and iced before he went to bed for the night.

"I'm not very good," Will warned, glass of wine forgotten as he stepped around the side of the counter to be beside Hannibal, who had placed his crutch aside, most of his weight on his good leg. His suit coat had already been removed and sleeves rolled up to expose his strong arms.

"Then how about we make something you've made with me before?" Hannibal offered, pulling a knife from the knife block and holding it over to will, handle out. Will took it, the motion familiar. "You slice the ginger."

"I already have," Will said without a thought as he took the knife, looking at his reflection in the pristine blade. "Lomo saltado?" Will glanced up as Hannibal's fluid movements of him getting ready to dice an onion came to an abrupt halt, though he didn't look up.

"Yes. You remember?" Hannibal asked, cutting several strips into the onion before turning it in the opposite direction.

"That evening?" Will questioned, getting to work on the ginger just as Hannibal had asked. "In vivid detail."

"And you're still not afraid of me?" Hannibal placed the now diced onion aside and grabbed a tomato.

"I don't think I could be afraid of you anymore Hannibal," Will muttered, eyebrows furrowed. "There's something that won't let me be."

"Pity," Hannibal muttered softly. "I will have to try harder."

Will gave a laugh at the comment and Hannibal did glance up to see a smile gracing those soft lips. Something so innocent to it as it extended to Will's eyes and deep into his soul. It was the prettiest thing that Hannibal had seen in a while and he let himself drift for a moment in the glow.

"Why do you want to scare me?" Will pondered aloud. "I thought you wanted someone to try to understand you."

"I don't need someone to try when you already do." Hannibal stole a look at the empath who had his lips bit between his teeth looking lost in thought. "You've gotten better with your knife skills."

Will looked back at the ginger that was cut into uneven shapes. He grimaced with a chuckle. "Flattery does not suit you, Dr. Lecter." He pushed the ginger aside and reached for the potatoes, going to the sink and trying his best to peel them with the knife that was still in hand.

After turning the potato into a sliver and nearly cutting off a finger or two, he could feel Hannibal's presence behind him. The scent of a damp forest encircled him as the warmth of a firm chest pressed into his back. Long, artistic fingers took his hands and a warm breath met his cheek.

"Use this," Hannibal whispered, voice soft against Will's skin. He pulled the large knife from Will's hand and replaced it with a smaller one, motioning for Will to grab another potato. Will obeyed, soaking in the warmth that wanted to swallow him whole that was radiating from the man behind him. Hannibal guided Will's hands carefully, angling Will's thumb just enough to create pressure for the knife to grip to. "You have to be gentle. You can't force it."

Will's mouth felt very dry and he cleared his throat with a small nod in understanding. "All of this feels like a dream," he whispered, voice rough as he felt Hannibal's lips brush against his neck. "Have we done this before?"

"Something similar," Hannibal replied softly, grip smothering as his hands let Will's work and took Will's hips in a strong grip. "I believe we made pasta."

"With a sauce made of white wine, butter, salt and some parmesan," Will whispered, hands still. "Maybe some fresh basil."

Hannibal released him at that, using the counter to help him walk back to where he had been working, taking his warmth and scent with him and leaving Will feeling peculiarly cold and empty. He turned back to see Hannibal working on slicing some meat, engrossed in his work with a fraction of a frown on his face and Will wondered if maybe he had said something wrong.

Will was about to ask for clarification, but Hannibal spoke, breaking up the quiet with a question that had Will scrambling. "Do you recall the night I asked you to run away with me?"

The knife slipped in Will's hand and he gasped as it nicked his finger. He shoved the digit into his mouth and was met with concerned eyes. Will turned on the sink and ran his finger under the water for a moment, the clear stream turning to a light pink as it mixed with his blood.

"I-I am afraid I don't," Will stuttered, voice cracking. Hannibal had moved back over and pulled Will's hand from the sink to look over the cut. "I'm alright, Hannibal."

"Let me take care of you, Will."

A strange pull filled Will's chest at the gentle order, letting Hannibal control him, trusting Hannibal to care for him. It was so easy for him to give up, to surrender to this kind monster that really didn't feel like a monster. It was becoming harder and harder for Will to see the killer in this man when every action the man took was done with Will in mind.

And that should bother Will. It would bother any normal person. It would make anyone else run away, but Will couldn't run, not that he wanted to. To be worshiped so completely was an overwhelming new sensation that Will wanted to live in completely. He had never been given this amount of devotion before and he could only wonder if Hannibal had always treated him with the reverence of a deity or if Hannibal was simply trying to take control of the situation, take total control of Will.

Will didn't care if Hannibal controlled him. He wanted nothing more than to let himself be taken care of so completely that he never had to want for anything ever again. Why shouldn't he be treated as such? Why shouldn't he be Hannibal's God? Why shouldn't he be anything and everything this killer revered with devotion and praise?

"What?" Will asked, shaking his head as muffled words cracked through the surface of his thoughts. He blinked and looked over his surroundings, finding himself seated at the bar of the island, a plate of food in front of him and his finger lightly bandaged. "I'm sorry."

"No need," Hannibal replied softly, a small smile on his lips as he took a sip of his wine. "I'm afraid I might have spooked you when I mentioned running away together. That was not my intention." Will blinked several times before slowly digging into the plate of food in front of him, his hunger gnawing at him. “Your memories are so scattered I’m not sure which ones paint me in a good light or a bad one.”

Will lowered his fork and looked over at the man beside him who was thoughtfully chewing on a mouthful of food. “What light do you wish to be painted in, Dr. Lecter?” Will questioned, allowing the conversation to sweep over him, ignoring his lost time. “Something innocent and blue, something gentle and yellow or something dark and red?”

“I would like to be remembered in all aspects, good or bad. I just want you to know me fully like you did before,” Hannibal answered with a small shrug of his shoulders that looked unnatural for the man to do.

“How well did I know you before?”

“I believe I told you intimately, Will.” Hannibal had finished off his plate and rose to his feet, crutch in place as he made his way to the sink to begin washing the dishes. “I’m not sure how much clearer I can possibly be.”

“You know intimately has many different connotations,” Will grumbled in mock annoyance. He couldn’t be upset with Hannibal. There was nothing that Hannibal had done wrong but Will hoped the tone of his voice would get him a better answer.

There was an exasperated sigh from Hannibal as his crutch slipped out from under him and he used the edge of the counter to catch himself before he fell, his crutch crashing to the floor. Will tipped his head to the side and slowly picked up his now finished plate, moving to the sink as well. He set his plate down beside the sink and bent over, scooping the crutch up from the floor, passing it back to Hannibal who wore a wearily thankful look.

“You should sit down,” Will said softly. “You’ve been standing nearly the whole time I’ve been here. I’m sure you’re not supposed to be.”

“I’m fine,” Hannibal assured with a deep breath. He released his white knuckle hold on the counter and straightened himself upright, fingers reaching up to straighten his tie as if he were composing himself. “Thank you.”

“You can’t take orders very well, can you?” Will grumbled, stepping closer and taking Hannibal’s hands in his so that the man couldn’t work. “Go sit down. You don’t have to be in control all of the time.”

“I don’t?” Hannibal asked softly, more in teasing than anything serious.

“No,” Will shook his head and one of his hands reached up to brush greying hair from Hannibal’s face. “You don’t. I can protect you while you rest.”

“You’d do that for someone like me?”

“Do you even have to ask that?” Will’s eyes met red for a moment, a moment too long, that pulling in his chest making him anxious as it dragged him closer to Hannibal with small steps. He wasn’t sure where he pulled the words from, but they held the utmost truth in them as they spilled out into the air between them. “I’ve killed for you, Hannibal. Do you not trust me after all of this time?”

The corner of Hannibal's lips pulled up lightly and Will closed his eyes as Hannibal's forehead rested against his. Hannibal shook his head, hands still holding tightly to Will. "I do not give trust easily, Will," he whispered into the shrinking space between them. "But I have always trusted you. More so than I should."

Will could nearly taste the wine on Hannibal's breath as Hannibal pushed in a little closer, but Will pulled back, heart beating uncomfortably in his throat. "Go sit down," he instructed, pushing Hannibal's hands away. "I can do the dishes."

There was a thickness of discontentment in the air as Hannibal obeyed. Will turned on the water, letting it warm up before grabbing the first plate and rinsing it off to add it to a nearby dishwasher. There was the scraping of chair legs against the floor and Will glanced up to find Hannibal adjusting himself in the chair that was now beside the sink.

"What do you mean when you say intimately?" Will asked over the running water. He did his best to keep his freshly bandaged finger from the water as he worked. When there wasn't an answer he looked to Hannibal to find the man simply watching him in interest as if Will were the single most fascinating thing in the universe.

"What do you think I mean?" Hannibal finally answered with his own question.

Will scoffed as he put the last dish into the dishwasher. He closed the door and then turned off the water, wiping his hands down on a towel before tossing the towel to the side to be forgotten. He folded his arms over his chest and rested his hip against the counter, with a pointed expression at Hannibal.

"Do I have to show you again?" Hannibal pushed innocently, though his eyes told Will what he was implying was anything but.

"Again?' Will questioned softly, trying to think back to something before.

Hannibal leaned in closer to Will and all feelings left him as lips pressed against his. Soft, light and chaste. Hannibal quickly pulled back as if anything more would be constructed as rude.

Will's eyes opened and he stared at Hannibal, a hand going to his lips as if Hannibal's had just been there, a ghostly heat left behind. If that were real then Will suddenly had the heat of embarrassment coursing through his body as the fact hit him that his sex dream was real too.

Hannibal's eyes dipped down Will's body at the flush that covered Will's normally pale skin. It spread from Will's cheeks, down the man's delicate neck and disappeared below the collar of his button up.

"What did you remember, Will?" Hannibal asked, his voice burning with curiosity, though his face stayed pleasantly blank. He was slightly taken aback as Will stepped closer, stride strong, just as he had been his last visit nearly a week ago, if not longer.

Hannibal didn't often let surprise stain his features, but he couldn't bring himself to hide the emotion that burst forth in his sternum as Will grabbed his face and kissed him with lips soft and warm. His lungs began to burn from lack of air before Will released him, breathing hard, forehead pressed against Hannibal's, hands still firm at his cheeks.

“I’ve dreamt of this,” Will gasped out. “Of you. Always you. Only you.” Another deep kiss was pushed against Hannibal’s lips and Hannibal’s eyes slid closed, letting the scent of petrichor, something earthy and alive, to encompass him. “How do you infect me like a disease?” Hands clutched at Will’s arms to ground the older man. “Make me unfaithfully ache for you?”

A moan left Hannibal as Will’s teeth clasped onto his bottom lip and Will shivered at how vulnerable the noise sounded coming from this man who was supposed to be able to pull any puppet string and make any person dance to his tune and cut the strings away just as easily.

“I’ve missed you, *mielas berniukas*.” Hannibal breathed against Will’s lips. Will whimpered into the kiss, pulling back abruptly.

“You do that on purpose,” he hissed out, biting at Hannibal’s jaw. “That’s not fair.”

“*Mylėti tave nėra sąžininga, brangiausia,”* Hannibal got out, unable to think in any other language than his natural tongue while Will’s mouth explored his skin.

Will growled and released Hannibal’s face, a single hand tangling up in Hannibal’s tie, pulling it free from his vest. “I hate your ties.” The words were said to wound on purpose, but Hannibal didn’t care. He could play that game too.

“What are you going to do about that?”

Will yanked on the tie, dragging Hannibal back in to kiss at his lips harshly, licking into Hannibal’s open mouth as fingers worked to release Hannibal of the paisley strung around his throat. There was a fleeting thought of tightening the knot, it would be so easy to do, but that could be done another time when Will could more thoroughly explore. For now he was starving and Hannibal was the only one who could sate him.

But not tonight.

Will broke the heavy kiss, trying to catch his breath, lids half closed in a lazy haze. He rested Hannibal’s tie on the counter, before a more gentle kiss was placed against Hannibal’s abused and swollen lips.

“I want you,” Will muttered, blood rushing in his ears. “But I can’t have you yet. You’re not mine to have.”

“We always have the future,” Hannibal offered with a hopeful tint to his accent that was husky with lust. Will could see the hunger in those murky pools of blood, but was grateful that Hannibal wasn’t pushing them further. “There’s no need to rush perfection.”

Will exhaled shakily at being compared to a flawlessness that he did not obtain. He closed his eyes, enjoying the feeling of strong fingers at his hips, holding him in this moment. Another kiss was shared between them, something far gentler than the earlier need to be fed. Something content with the present.

“Hannibal?” Will asked delicately, barely a whisper.

“Yes Will?”

“I remember coming to your home one morning. You were wearing these ridiculously formal lounge clothes and a robe of midnight blue silk.” Hannibal listened to Will’s words carefully wondering if he was adding in so many ridiculous details so that he could prove that he really did remember. “You had this overly complicated contraption to make coffee.” Hannibal smiled at the description Will provided, seeing Will a little clearer with every word. "I remember it being so perfectly made I thought maybe I had sold my soul to just be graced with your cooking whenever I so demanded. What do I have to do so that you’ll make me that coffee again?”

Chapter End Notes

mielas berniukas-cute boy
Mylėti tave nėra sąžininga, brangiausia-Loving you is not fair, dearest

Thanks again to my sister and my wonderful beta, @PitaGonzalezMe on twitter.

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

“Wouldn’t you want all of the witnesses dead?” Walter asked, glancing up at Will.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys. My beta hates when I swear, but I've been having a really fucking shit awful day. One of my fav authors posted today and it kinda made me feel better, so I thought maybe if anyone else was in the same boat as me that maybe another chapter would cheer them up. So, surprise! An extra chapter. Love you all. Thanks for all the kudos and comments. As always, I hope you enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Losing
You
Terrifies
Me

“We’re going out for breakfast!” Danny said excitedly, shaking Walter who was still mostly asleep. Walter groaned and pulled the blankets over his head, trying to block out the early morning light that was pouring through the open window. “Get up, Wally.”

“Do we have to go out? Your dad can just cook something and I can sleep,” Walter muttered out behind a yawn. He smiled with a laugh as Danny threw a pillow at him. “Alright, I’ll get up.” He sat up and stretched, finding that Danny was already dressed, shoes on and hair brushed. “What has you so excited about breakfast?” Walter got from the bed and went to his bag, digging through it to have some clothes.

“I get tired of Jordan’s cooking,” Danny replied, sitting on the edge of the bed with a small shrug. “It’s always good, but sometimes I just want dinosaur chicken nuggets.”

Walter gave another laugh. “We had that for dinner.”

“Exactly!” Danny explained, hands up in the air. “Jordan is too perfect. I don’t think that he gets that kids don’t want fancy things. We want junk. And that’s what this breakfast is going to be. Junk!”

“Why do you still call him Jordan?” Walter asked as he went for the bathroom, closing the door behind him with some privacy, hearing Danny take a seat outside of the door so that they could still talk. “Aren’t your dads married?”

“Yeah,” came Danny's muffled voice from just outside the door. Walter pulled his pjs off and pulled on his shirt, hair messy in the mirror. “But he’s not my dad. He’s more like an uncle. He’s nice, but... I don’t know. What about Mr. Graham? Why do you call him dad?”

Walter shrugged even though he knew that Danny couldn’t see him. “Because he’s the only dad I’ve ever known, I guess. I really like him.”

He quickly brushed his teeth and left the room to Casey’s voice calling them down. Danny and him rushed from the room and down the stairs. “Where are Skylar and Jessie?” Danny asked as they hit the main floor. “Wouldn’t they want to come too?”

“It’s just going to be us this morning,” Casey explained, pulling on his coat beside Jordan who was pulling his keys from his pocket. “We’re going to meet up after breakfast and then we’ll head up to the ski slopes.”

Walter glanced around curiously, having not even heard the younger children up yet, though he was sure that they would have been bouncing off the walls long before their parents got up. But maybe they weren’t like him. They were well behaved kids and Walter had grown up with a mother who was very busy and so he took care of himself mostly when his mother wasn’t there, which usually meant a badly pour mess of coco-puffs and a too loud tv playing cartoons.

It was like that until Will showed up. Will had brought new changes to the house. Changes that Walter hadn’t liked at first. An order, a structure, rules. But now Walter was grateful for them, if an eleven year old boy could understand and put a name to what the feeling of gratefulness was.

“Out to the car, boys,” Jordan instructed, opening the front door. The two of them raced from the house and to the car.

Breakfast was nice. Walter couldn't help but smile at how kind Jordan and Casey were to each other. It was sweet and it reminded Walter of when his mom and Will had first met.

He had been so kind to her, made her so happy. He was still so kind to her, but Walter knew that he had secrets of a past life before them that were creeping back in and that Will was more ready to face them head on now that he had been and his mom wasn't ready to tackle them together.

Walter wasn't blind to the change in their lives. He could remember when Jack Crawford had shown up at their home and told them about how the killer, the Chesapeake Ripper, had escaped his confinement in a mental institute and had kidnapped Will.

His mother lost it. Wanted to do everything she could to find him and Walter watched her crumble to the floor, sobbing. For nearly a month he watched her sink into a depression over the man until one day it was like a switch flipped.

She was back to normal, back to how it was before Will. Picking up the pieces and tossing them away like they never existed. She went back to work, back to playing the roles of both parents, taking care of Walter as if nothing had ever happened at all.

And when Will had been found, Molly became stiff and rigid as if she had been prepared to live the rest of her life without him and wasn't sure how to function with him back again.

Will hadn't made it easy. Walter could sense the tension every time Will came home from work. Will tried to be the husband and father he was, but it had just been so long and so much had changed in those months that it didn't surprise Walter that they had split up.

Walter could accept if they didn't get back together, even if it would feel a little strange. Both of them seemed happier apart than they had together. As long as Walter still got to see his father, Walter would be happy too. Will still had to take him fishing again, as it were, and Walter wasn’t about to give that up.

With breakfast finished, they returned to the house they were staying at, Danny and Walter racing in to try to play some video games before they left to go skiing.

They both rushed into the living room and Walter froze at the sight of something dark and sticky on the floor from behind the couch. He caught Danny's arm before his friend could go much further into the room. "Go get Casey," Walter muttered. "Don't look. Don't let Jordan in here."

"Wal-"

"Go get Casey," Walter repeated, turning Danny around and pushing him from the room. "He will know what to do."

Danny slowly left to go back outside to get his dad and Walter inhaled deeply, turning back to the living room. He carefully stepped around the puddle of blood, heart pounding just as it had those months ago when his mother had woken him from a deep sleep and told him to sneak out of the window and wait for her at the car.

His eyes rested on the bodies of Skyler and Jessie as well as their four children. Each one very pale and very dead. The parents stabbed and the children clutching each other tightly with band aids on their heads.

The scream that welled up in Walter 's throat got stuck as a lump and he pulled his phone from his pocket, calling the first number that came to his mind.

The annoying little chipper beeps of a ring tone sounded yet again, breaking up the early morning air, causing Hannibal to frown. Will's phone danced on the bedside table, the screen lit up before turning off as the call was ignored once more.

Hannibal glared at the small device, wishing he could reach over and turn it off, but he didn't want to pull Will from a sleep that Hannibal knew was few and far between. One that had been calm and without nightmares.

The phone went off again and Hannibal closed his book to look at the phone, exasperated. Who needed Will this early in the morning?

"That's Jack's ringtone," Will muttered in answer with a deep breath, nuzzling his face deeper into the pillow.

Hannibal reached out and stroked Will's tangled curls, fingers catching in them. "Do you need to answer it?"

"I don't want to work on a Saturday," Will grumbled. "I'm two hours away and I still have to explain why I'm here to Alana and Margot."

"It's early enough that they probably aren't up yet," Hannibal mused, fingers caressing down Will's bare back, carefully feeling each knob of his spine that had too tight of skin pulled taut from his lack of eating. "If you wanted to make a quick getaway."

Will shivered and rolled over to face Hannibal. "I am not doing the walk of shame," Will stated with a smile. "I have no reason to." Will sat up and leaned over, placing a swift kiss to Hannibal's lips. "We didn't do anything scandalous."

Hannibal huffed with a roll of his eyes, knowing just how uneventful the rest of the night had been in an easy and relaxing sort of way. Coffee, kissing, making Will stay because finding a hotel was a pointless venture or so Hannibal had convinced, more kissing, and falling asleep beside each other in a fashion that Hannibal had missed so completely that he didn’t want to let Will leave the bed in case he had dreamt up the feeling. "How did you sleep?"

"Better than I have in a long time," Will answered, shifting so that he could lean against Hannibal's shoulder. Hannibal's arm wrapped around Will, his fingers resting on Will's hip, caressing the soft skin there. "My mind was pleasantly... blank for once."

Hannibal nodded and reopened his book, a comfortable silence filling the room again and Will closed his eyes, breathing deeply of the scent of old books. He could almost hear the crackle of a fireplace flickering and alive, see the quiet snow falling outside of massive windows, the wet nose of a dog against his hand, wanting attention while Will was content to listen to the turn of pages and the breathing of the man beneath him.

The phone went off again, shattering the quiet and Will glanced over at the phone with a deep exhale. "That's my son," Will muttered, sitting up and rising from the bed, snatching up his phone and leaving Hannibal with a small bud of jealousy blooming somewhere in his gut. "Hello?" Will asked, bending over to pick up his shirt from where he had tossed it on the floor in a tired stooper the night before. Hannibal watched as the man's body stiffened. "Walter," Will said firmly, but not unkindly. "Walter, you're talking too fast."

"D-Dad," Walter stuttered out across the line. "They're- they are-they-"

"Walter," Will said once more, eyebrows furrowed at his son's shaky voice. "You need to calm down. What's wrong?"

"They're dead, dad," Walter gasped out with a deep voice. "Skyler and Jessie and all of the kids. They're dead."

Will's eyes widened. "Are you ok?"

"They were stabbed and-"

"Walter, are you ok?" Will demanded as he gathered up the rest of his clothes.

"Yes. I'm fine."

"I need you to listen carefully to me," Will said, putting the phone on speaker and placing it back onto the bedside table so that he could hurriedly get dressed. Hannibal watched in interest, silent as the man worked. "Do not touch anything. Do not let anyone touch anything. You're sure they're dead?"

"Yes," Walter's faint voice said through the phone.

"Walter, let's get out of this room," a muffled voice said in concern from behind Walter.

"Is that Casey?" Will asked, sitting back on the bed, pulling on his shoes. "Put him on the phone."

"Will?" Casey's voice asked, now more solid.

Will snatched up his phone and put it back to his ear, a hand to his head. "Are any of them breathing?"

"No," was Will's answer. "It looks like they've been dead for a while."

"Casey, I need you to lock down the house for me. I know Jordan can't handle that at the moment. Don't let anyone touch anything, don't walk through the scene. Wait outside for me. I will be there in about twenty minutes."

"Of course," Casey replied in determination. "Should I call the police?"

"No. They'll ruin the scene. I'll have my team come and look at it. Be there soon." Will ended the call, shoving his phone into his pocket and with a deep breath, turned to look to Hannibal who was watching in a silent curiosity. "I need to go."

"Sounds important," Hannibal agreed. "Is the boy alright?"

"Just shaken up," Will answered, patting himself down until he found his keys. "I'm sorry to rush out."

"Do not be sorry. I had a pleasant time."

Will gave a weak smile and nodded a goodbye, rushing from the bedroom, phone once more out to call Jack.

"Dad!" Walter called, jumping from where he sat on the front porch of the house and running to Will who rushed from his car.

Will caught the boy against his torso in a tight hug, Walter's grip around his waist painful.

"It's ok," Will whispered, hand caressing the boy's dark hair. "It's alright." He placed a kiss to his son's head and glanced up to where Jordan, Casey and Danny were sitting fairly calmly on the porch steps. "Your mother will be here in a few hours to take you home."

"I want to stay with you," Walter's voice said, muffled against Will's chest.

"She wants you home and I will be here for a while. I have to help process what happened. Did anyone else see?"

"Just Casey," Walter explained. "I made sure Danny left the room before he could see and Jordan didn't go into the house."

Will gently guided Walter back to the house where the others were sitting, the boy still clutching tight to Will's body, not letting his father go.

"Do you know what happened?" Will asked softly, glancing over Casey and Jordan.

"We have no idea." Casey was the one to answer, Jordan looking at a loss for words. "We were discussing plans this morning. We took the boys out for breakfast and we were going to meet up after. They wanted to stay home to have time to get the younger kids ready to go. When we got home from breakfast, Walter found them."

Will nodded and pushed Walter away from him, kneeling down and taking Walter's shoulders. "I need you to tell me what you saw. Exactly. Every detail, even if you think it doesn't matter, it does."

Walter shook his head. "I just want to forget."

"I know it's hard," Will said softly, hand taking Walter's cheek in what he hoped was a gentle comfort. "I understand how badly these things can stick to you. I do, but I need to know."

Walter licked at his lips and nodded, closing his eyes. His voice was much softer than Will thought it was going to be, something low that only he could hear. "When we got up this morning, none of the children were up. Kids are always up on Saturday before their parents, aren't they?" Walter's eyes opened, meeting his father's listening blue gaze. "They eat things that shouldn't be eaten for breakfast and watch the TV. a little too loud, don't they?"

Will gave a small nod, listening intently to the odd beginning of the story. He had been expecting Walter to start broken and sobbing with the bodies.

"We came back and went to play video games. There was blood on the ground. I told Danny to go get Casey and I stepped around the couch." Walter's face was blank and Will could see the distance in his son's eyes as he replayed the horror in his mind. "Skyler and Jessie were stabbed. Their kids were tied up and they had blood down their faces from band aids. Were they shot?"

"Yes," Will answered, not bothering with sugar coating anything. It wouldn't help the situation. Nothing could fix this, there was a point where protection became hindrance. "What else?"

"What are you wanting?" Walter's eyes closed, scrunched shut with a frown.

"Any detail that doesn't fit. What else doesn't fit, Wally?"

"I don't remember hearing any gunshots."

Will tipped his head to the side, eyes wandering over Walter. "What makes you say that?"

"I think they were dead before we left for breakfast. The kids weren't making noise."

Will bit his lip at the opinion shared in the open between them, soft and only between them. "Thank you Walter. We'll get this figured out."

"Can I watch?" Walter asked, causing Will to stop on his way into the house, effectively blocking his team from entering, stopping them all like an accordion.

"Your mother-"

"I want to understand," Walter said strongly, hands on his hips.

"Maybe he'll see something," Beverly said with a shrug leaning against the doorframe of the house. "He was perceptive about the children earlier."

Will shook his head, trying to block out the woman's words, knowing that as true as that was, his son deserved better.

"Absolutely not," Will stated strongly, pushing open the door to the house and letting the team inside to look around.

"You said that no one has touched anything, correct?" Jack asked, heading in the direction that Casey had said the living room was in.

"No one has been in here since Walter called me," Will agreed with a nod.

"It's nice to see Will play Daddy Dearest," Zeller teased, slapping at Will's cheek. Will blinked and took a step back.

"Makes you almost want a kid, doesn't it?" Price continued. "Or maybe it's more hassle than it's worth."

"Who would want a mini you running around?" Zeller shot back making Price grumble softly. "One you is more than enough. The fact that you're a twin is ridiculous."

"No one wants a mini me either," Will muttered, hand rubbing at where Zeller had hit him.

"I think he's cute," Beverly defended, keeping to Will's side as she watched the men walk into the living room. "You've been good to him."

"I hope so," Will whispered, trying to keep his voice lowered so that the others wouldn't make fun of him for talking to himself.

"Will, I will call you in when we need your help," Jack called from the other room. "Have you seen this yet?"

"Walter wouldn't let me leave his side," Will explained, folding his arms over his chest. "I haven't had the chance."

"He's a brave kid," Zeller stated.

"Yeah, this is pretty brutal," Price added.

Will winced and he slowly made his way towards the voices, stepping down into the sitting room where he could see the blood pooling under the couch and across the floor.

"He's pretending," Beverly said from behind Will as Will stepped around the couch to see what awaited him. "He wants to be strong for you. You can see how broken he is inside."

Will gave an absent nod, eyes looking over the scene his son had found. It was a Witch Hunter's crime. That much was clear. Two stabbings, a ring of salt, the smell of burnt sage and absent candles, knife left on the floor this time instead of in the driveway.

But Will couldn't exactly get over the age of the children. All four of them were no older than ten, the youngest a toddler. Will didn't want to put himself in the mind of someone who could do that. Other killers were one thing, someone like Hannibal he could put himself in the shoes of. Hannibal had a reason, someone had committed an unforgivable act of rudeness and needed to be purged. Hannibal would never touch a child. It was in a child’s nature to be rude. They didn’t have the control over their tongues yet. But whoever could stare a crying child in the eye, aim a gun right at their head and pull the trigger while having their own child at home made Will want to run.

"Will, go check on the kid. I will get you when we are ready for you," Jack repeated.

Will gave a small nod and left the room, heading back outside, sitting down on the porch steps, beside Walter who was still pale looking, though that was to be expected.

"You look sick, dad," the boy muttered. "Is that what you see all of the time?"

"More than I would like," Will replied, watching Jordan playing catch with Danny while Casey stood to the side watching. Will would have thought the actions odd if he too didn't feel the want of a distraction. And he couldn't let them leave without giving their statements to Jack, so a distraction was what was needed.

"I see it every time I close my eyes," Walter continued softly. “Does it ever go away?”

“I’ll let you know when it does,” Will whispered.

"I feel like I want to scream. I can feel it under my chin."

"You can let it out," Will offered, seeming to recall a similar conversation with Alana, one where he was chained to a table. "No one would judge you."

"I'm afraid that if I start then I might not be able to stop." Walter took a deep breath, running fingers through his hair. "Mom is going to freak. I almost wish you could have lied to her."

"And tell her what?" Will asked curiously, looking over his son carefully, trying to read his very still expression.

"That I was sick and had to come home early." Walter gave a shrug, chin wobbling. "I don't want her to worry."

"She's your mother," Will pointed out, watching the kid struggling to keep it together. "She will always worry about you."

"This was too much to add into what she's dealing with at the moment."

"What is she dealing with?"

Walter bit his bottom lip as it quivered. "She was supposed to meet with a lawyer today."

"Oh." Will was sure that the word didn't come out nearly as hurt as he had meant it to be, though it reflected the stillness inside of him. That same weird numbness filled him from the night that Molly had told him she was leaving. A feeling of near relief. "Your mother would be better off without me," Will offered, though he knew it wouldn't bring any solace to the situation.

"I'm more worried about you than my mom," Walter confided, fingers shaking as they wrung themselves out. "She can deal with this. She's done it before. I’ve watched her pick her life back up before. But I don't want to lose you."

Will stared in shock as Walter met his gaze. "Me?"

"You're my dad," Walter answered with a small nod, Will able to see the cracks growing in those brown eyes as tears were held at bay. "You'll fight for me, won't you?"

"I can't take you away from your mother," Will got out through the stunned emotions curling around his ribs like ivy.

"Just partial custody. I'm not old enough to pick who I want to live with yet. And I couldn't pick between either one of you, but even weekends would be enough. Please dad!"

Will licked his lips, listening to the begging child beside him. "You've put a lot of thought into this," he muttered, pinching at the bridge of his nose. "The courts will want you to stay with your mother."

"Just weekends," Walter pleaded softly. "You still need to take me fishing again."

Will sighed. He knew it was going to be futile. He knew he was going to spend money he didn't have if he agreed. He knew that the courts wouldn't take him seriously. Not with his mental breaks, memory problems and having been locked away in a mental institute for a good year. They wouldn’t care if the charges had been dropped, it didn’t matter. His profession would do nothing to help in any regards either. He was often the target of killing sprees when he got too close, someone already having tried to take out his family once before. He wasn’t the father material and the courts would be more than happy to drag him through the dirt to prove that.

"I will do my best, but I can't promise that I will win. All of the chips are stacked against me," Will said, reaching out and giving his son’s knee a small squeeze.

“Thank you, dad.” Walter gave a deep sigh, closing his eyes and shuttering. “Dad?”

“Yes?” Will’s hand reached out and he rubbed circles into the boy’s back, hoping it would bring the same calm to Walter as it brought to Will when Hannibal touched him. Sometimes the motions would give Will’s mind a much needed moment of clarity and he knew that Walter needed that too.

“Why didn’t they kill us?”

Will found himself at a loss for words. The thought hadn’t even entered his mind. He had been so focused on making sure that Walter was alright and getting everything in order for the investigation that that simple thought had avoided him.

“If I am right,” Walter continued, eyes firmly on the ground, “and they were dead before we left the house, why didn’t they kill the rest of us? We were asleep. We would have been easy.”

“You don’t fit their victim profile,” Will said thickly, throat clicking from how dry it had become. “You don’t belong to a family of six, you haven’t come into any money, you do not treat others with disdain.”

“Wouldn’t you want all of the witnesses dead?” Walter asked, glancing up at Will.

“You didn’t see anything else, did you?” Will questioned, a new found worry entering him. Walter shook his head. “Then you weren’t a witness.”

“You said I didn’t come into any money.” Will gave a nod at the statement. “They had just bought this house. Heard them nearly bragging about it to Jordan when Casey was trying to get us upstairs for bed. Is that why they were killed? Because they bought the house?”

Will blinked several times and got to his feet. “Casey?” he called, the man placing his attention on the empath for a moment before making his way over with a questioning smile. “Your friends,” Will continued, looking back at the house. “They just moved here?”

“Yeah,” Casey replied with a nod, shoving his hands into his jean pockets. “About a month ago. Skyler’s father passed away. Left her the family business. She sold it.”

Will licked at his lips. “What do you do for a living, Casey?”

Casey gave a questioning look at the inquiry and shrugged after a moment. “I do odd shifts for a maintenance company on the weekends sometimes, just to keep from being bored. I stay home with Danny most of the time.”

“And what does your husband do?”

“He’s a CPA.” Casey gave a smile. “Why?”

“I was just wondering,” Will answered as innocently as he could, giving his own shrug. “How long have you had the cat?”

Casey’s smile dropped just slightly. “A few months. I don’t see what this has to do with anything.”

“Just my own curiosities,” Will said with a tight smile, attention going to the door as it opened and Jack stood in it, holding out an evidence bag.

Will stepped over and took it, looking over the new tarot card that was present. A man stood at the edge of a cliff with a bundle over his shoulder, a flower in one hand and a little dog nipping at his heels. The Fool.

Upright: innocence, new beginnings, free spirit. Reversed...

“Casey, were your friends reckless with their money?” Will asked, glancing up to look at Casey shift uncomfortably.

“I don’t know if I would call them reckless,” he replied stiffly. “But once they had it, they liked to flaunt it.”

“And did you find that inconsiderate?”

Casey gave a dismissing shrug. “It was a bit on the rude side, but I don’t think they were aware they did it. I think they were people who were easily taken advantage of their whole lives and now had a chance to get out of that mind space.”

Reversed: recklessness, taken advantage of, inconsideration.

“I’m assuming you’re ready for me?” Will asked, question directed at Jack. Jack gave a nod and Will passed the evidence bag back to him. “Will you please take their statements? I’m sure they would love more than anything to be on their way home.” Jack once again gave a nod and Will let himself into the house, motioning Walter to come with him. Once inside and the door shut, Will turned to Walter, hand tight on the boy’s shoulder. “What did they say that was wrong?”

“What?” Walter asked, eyes leaving the direction of the living room and going to Will.

“You know them better than I do. Did Casey say anything that was wrong?”

“They just got the cat a night or two before we went over for dinner,” Walter replied with a small nod of his head as he recalled the details of that night. “Danny had texted me pictures of him.”

“They didn’t have the cat when we went to that restaurant?” Walter shook his head and Will let out a deep breath. “I need you to stay right here, do you understand?” Walter gave a cautious nod. “I don’t want you seeing what’s in there again and I do not want you anywhere near Jordan or Casey until your mother gets here and can keep an eye on you.”

“You think that-”

“I don’t know what I think,” Will interrupted sharply. “But my gut is telling me that you are safest right here.”

“Ok dad.”

Will released the boy’s shoulder and Walter watched as his father went for the living room, taking a pair of gloves that were passed to him by a man with dark, gelled back curls. Walter took a few more steps towards the living room to see Will. He had always wanted to watch his father work. Ever since Will had been able to guess nearly everything right in every case, according to Tattle-Crime, which he sadly could no longer read because his mother had blocked the site, Walter had wanted to see this strange man in action. He wanted to understand how his father could become another person, so to speak.

Walter watched as Will pulled on his blue latex gloves and took a deep breath, standing to one side of the crime scene. The other two men, who were both wearing FBI windbreakers, stepped a little further out of the room as if to give Will some privacy.

Will's eyes slid shut and Walter waited patiently for something to happen. Will's shoulders rose and fell with every breath he took and his eyes fluttered behind his eyelids, face contorting into an expression that was cold and calculated. Walter could make out Will's mouth moving, speaking to himself, though Walter was nowhere near close enough to hear anything that was coming from him.

He raised a hand, index finger out and thumb up like a gun and it aimed right for where Walter knew the children would be, Will's head tilting as he looked with still closed eyes down at the bodies of the parents.

The sound of a car outside pulled Walter from his observation and he glanced out of a nearby window to find his mother's car. He could hear the door slam shut and see his mother, looking flushed and upset, making her way towards the house.

"Mom," Walter said, catching the attention of Zeller and Price who both shared a look to ask if they should interrupt Will or let him keep working. "Dad, Mom's here."

There was a sharp inhale as Walter's voice pulled the empath abruptly from his train of thought, giving him an instant migraine as he shook and tried to catch his breath, hand dropping back to his side.

It wasn't very often that Will was ripped from the middle of his analyses and it never ended well for him when he was. To be that rapidly wrenched from one train of thought and placed on another against his will would make him sick for a day or two. It had happened once back in college and he missed his finals because he couldn't even get out of bed.

A hand went to his head and he bent over in pain, hissing in air through his teeth until he could straighten himself up, hearing Molly's overly loud and worried voice outside. Will carefully stepped around the crime scene hearing the woman yelling at Jack for not letting her inside to find her son and Jordan's accent doing its best to calm her down.

Will stepped over to the window and glanced through it to see police officers finally arriving, a neighbor or someone most likely noticing the odd people moving in and out of the house with equipment and federal agent gear. Lights blared in reds and blues and made Will wince.

"Come on, Walter," he whispered, hand taking Walter's shoulder and leading him out the front door.

"Walter!" Molly said, stopping mid yell at Jack and racing over to her son, giving Jack an out to go and assure some officers that they were in every right to be present with a flash of his badge. "Thank God." Molly scooped her son up in a hug, hands trembling as they patted him down checking for any injuries. "You're alright."

"I'm fine," Walter assured her. "Will was here."

Will looked over Walter who had quickly returned to calling him Will in front of Molly. He was a smart boy. Calm and collected and holding it all together to save face because he knew how badly his mother would be hurting. Forever the shield and savior of his mother, taking all of the hits so that she could be happy and sound while he broke to pieces by himself.

“Thank you,” Molly said softly, eyes meeting Will’s who quickly looked away, not wanting to make eye contact with the woman. He didn’t want to see what underlying emotions were there because he knew that however illogical it was, Molly was going to blame him for what happened. “I’m waiting for an *I told you so*.”

Will shook his head. “It never crossed my mind.”

“Walter, I want you in the car. We’re going home,” Molly instructed.

“I want to stay with Will,” Walter argued gently, his voice saying he would obey if his mother asked again. Will’s chest grew tight at the boy’s words, feeling oddly closer to his son more so now than he ever had before.

“You do not belong around this type of thing,” Molly explained. “Go to the car. I need to talk to Will for a moment.”

“Ok,” Walter answered softly with a nod. “Bye Will.”

Will was about to utter a goodbye when arms wrapped around his middle, knocking him slightly off balance and making his mind ache at the jolt. He hugged the kid back with a small smile before pushing Walter back and kneeling down. “Call me if you need anything, alright? You do not need to be afraid of the nightmares that are coming. I will be there for you through them, do you understand Wally?”

Walter gave a nod and glanced back up at Molly at a firm hand on his shoulder. Will let him go and watched as he walked to Molly’s car, waving goodbye to Jordan, Casey and Danny.

“When can we get his things?”

Will inhaled deeply, eyes returning to Molly, to the bridge of her nose. “Once the scene is finished being processed I will bring his things over,” Will replied.

“How do you keep dragging us into these things?” Molly gasped out, a hand going to her head with tears being held back by harsh breathing. “This is the second time that he has nearly been killed. This isn’t good for him!”

“How is this my fault?” Will asked curiously, pulling his gloves from his hands and shoving them into his pocket so that he had something to do rather than stare at Molly. He wished he had his glasses so that he could go about cleaning them or something of the sort.

“This never happened before you!”

Will licked at his lips, trying to find a rebuttal to the accusation, but that one held truth to it. They wouldn’t be safe around him, they were never going to be safe around him, but he had tried. Molly just hadn’t listened.

“Is this a good time for the *I told you so* you so desperately want to hear from me?” Will decided on with a bitterness in his mouth at his only defense. He hadn’t wanted to bring up that he had been right, it never ended well, but it felt like the only thing he had to work with. “Because I would rather not.”

“Stop flattering yourself,” Molly snapped, pointing at Will. “You’re always so self-righteous when it comes to this stuff!”

“This is what I do for a living. I find killers for a living. I see things other people don’t see and are just too blind to notice or care about,” Will defended, doing his very best to keep his voice steady and not raise it at the woman. “I told you not to let him come.”

“There it is,” Molly scoffed, hands thrown up in the air. “Feel better?”

“Not really.” Will folded his arms over his chest with a frown. “I don’t like being right, especially about things that get Walter into harm's way.”

“You get Walter into harm’s way. I’m not letting you see him anymore.”

Will’s face dropped and his arms fell back to his sides. “You what?” His mouth felt sticky as her words slowly sunk in through his pounding head and registered inside of him. “No.”

“Will, he does not deserve to grow up with this!” Molly said loud enough that Will could sense other’s eyes on them. He shifted uncomfortably from all of the new attention. “He does not need you in his life! Especially if he’s going to keep waking up to things like this!”

“You’re not taking him from me,” Will said firmly. “I will fight for him.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Walter said you were meeting with lawyers,” Will answered, pointing out to Molly’s car where Walter sat, watching them out of the window. “When were you going to tell me?”

Molly sighed, a hand going to her head. “It’s not official yet, I was just discussing options.”

“That sounds pretty damn official. What, were you going to wait until all of the paper work was drawn up, shove it into my hand after talking to every lawyer in the state so that I can’t find representation and then tell me good fucking luck?” Will demanded, letting his emotions fill him a little more than he normally would, jaw tight.

“I-”

“You’re not taking him from me, Molly. He’s my son too.”

“No he isn't!” Molly shouted, voice echoing around them and down the street, causing Will to wince. “He is my son! Don’t think so highly of yourself!” She exhaled through her nose harshly. “Do not come near him again!”

Without another word, Molly turned on her heel and left for her car, pulling her keys from her coat, leaving Will very quiet and cold. He glanced around at the officers, Jack and his suspects who were all staring at him with various expressions ranging from pity to disgust. Will quickly turned back to the house to see both Zeller and Price staring out of the window in shock and Will groaned, pushing open the door to the house and stepping inside.

“Calm down, hotshot,” Beverly warned. “You know Molly is just worked up because she’s scared about her kid.”

“Shut up!” Will ordered, a hand to his head as his voice rang back at him from the cavernous ceilings, making his head ache ferociously.

“We didn’t say anything,” Price said softly from behind Will where the two of them were still at the window.

Will rubbed at his jaw and closed his eyes, holding back the sob in his throat that ripped at him and wanted to escape. He wanted to sink to his knees and scream, the feeling building up speed like a freight train in his chest until it was curled under his chin and punching at his teeth.

“Will.” Will’s eyes shot open with a deep exhale and he was met with Jack in front of him. “Are you alright?”

“Fine,” Will answered through clenched teeth.

“Are you getting too close to this case?” Jack asked. Will shook his head. “I can not have you emotionally involved here. It is going to skew your judgement.”

“I just want to go home Jack. Can we just wrap this up?” Will asked softly, the anger leaving his body and making him shiver with a new found cold. “Please?”

* * *

There was a knock at the window and Hannibal looked up from his newest sketch, waiting to see if maybe the sound had been part of his imagination or not. There was another knock, this one a little more urgent than the last one.

Hannibal lowered his pencil and rose to his feet, placing his crutch under his arm. He made his way over to the window next to his bed and pushed open the curtains that let moonlight spill into the room that had been dimly lit with only a single lamp at Hannibal’s desk.

His eyes flickered over an expression that he couldn’t quite place on the empath’s face. A look that Hannibal had seen on Will’s face when a difficult case would come up. Something blank, but at the same time so absolutely haunted. Beautiful shadows and tired, wide eyes.

Hannibal hadn’t been expecting to see the man again so quickly. At least not for another week or so, unless he had finished the book already and returned it to Alana. Though when they had met yesterday, it seemed like Will still hadn’t even cracked the spine yet.

Hannibal reached up and unclasped the window’s decorative lock and pushed the pane of glass open. Lips were quickly pressed to his own, desperate for something solid to hold to, the dark smell of bitterness strong on the man’s skin as fingers dug into Hannibal’s shoulders.

“I need help,” Will whispered when he broke the kiss. “Please.”

“You only have to ask,” Hannibal answered softly.

Chapter End Notes

I guess this song was the one I was listening to for this chapter. Interesting to go back through and see why the hell I wanted these particular feeling to be put into my story.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4NouN_IxvM8

Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

> “He was... special to me,” Will said slowly, testing the words as they were said. “And I know that it’s wrong to feel protective over a corpse I didn’t know, but I was and I still feel like I was wounded when they took him from me, though he wasn’t mine.”

Chapter Notes

> Hey peeps. Just a heads up. I started two new jobs and so I don't know when new chapters will be posted. I will still try to keep up a weekly update schedule and try to get normal chapter out for my We Grow Accustomed To The Dark story as well.
> I'm super excited about one of my jobs. I went to school for music and it's to be a music teacher, so college was not wasted! Haha. Thanks for understanding. Love you all!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

LOSING
YOU
TERRIFIES
ME

Will sighed, falling into Hannibal’s touch, resting back against Hannibal’s chest, head resting on Hannibal’s shoulder, eyes closed as the headache washed away from the pressure point being held.

“You taught me that, didn’t you?” Will asked softly, feeling Hannibal’s lips at his temple. Hannibal hummed in answer and Will inhaled deeply, letting Hannibal’s warmth seep into his skin and cradle him. “That’s been about the only thing to get rid of my migraines. I think medicine has reached its effectiveness.”

“I’m glad I was of help,” Hannibal whispered, his free arm wrapping around Will’s front and pulling the empath closer. Hannibal’s back was fully against the headboard of his bed, Will between his legs, letting the man just relax in his grip. Something that Will shouldn’t have been as open to as he was. “Was this all that you needed?”

Will shook his now clear head, keeping his eyes closed. “This case isn’t adding up,” Will replied, another sigh leaving him as Hannibal’s lips pressed into the dip of his jaw. His neck stretched out to give Hannibal more room to work, Hannibal taking full advantage of Will's neck.

"Tell me about it," Hannibal instructed softly against Will's pulse that fluttered deliciously under his lips.

"You don't mind?"

"I used to consult for the FBI, Will." Hannibal's fingers slid under Will's shirt, finger tracing over the scar that he had left there years before. "I kill people." A shiver rippled through Will as teeth grazed over his cheek. God, he was in too deep. "I was your psychiatrist. Who knows your mind better?"

"Stop," Will breathed out, free hand catching Hannibal's. "I can't think when you're touching me like this."

"Do you have to think?" Hannibal teased, hot tongue licking at the shell of Will's ear and enticing a moan from Will. Hannibal gave a small chuckle and nipped at his ear, enjoying the way that Will's hand jumped up to snatch into silver hair. "Forgive me." Hannibal stopped his assault and Will gave a deep breath, only seeming to further relax into Hannibal, so much more relaxed than he had been when Hannibal had been trying to show the man his becoming. "What about this case has you so distraught?"

"It involves Walter now."

"Your son."

Will gave a nod and opened his eyes, letting his fingers brush through Hannibal's silky soft hair. Hannibal leaned into the touch and Will gave a small smile. "This is so teenager," he commented as Hannibal snatched his hand and placed a kiss into his palm and then to the life force in his wrist. "Me sneaking into your bedroom in the middle of the night because I'm being chased by monsters."

"Did you do that often as a teenager?" Hannibal asked curiously against Will's wrist.

"To go camping during the summer every now and then. I didn't have many friends growing up and even fewer girlfriends. If my father was a little more drunk than normal I would wander the forests. We always seemed to live near a forest of some sort."

"What were you looking for?"

"I'm not sure," Will answered softly, thinking back to his childhood. "I think I found it once though, whatever *it* is." Hannibal waited patiently for Will to continue, listening in interest as he let Will's hand go and circled his arm back around Will to keep him firmly in place, held in comfort, letting Will know that anything said between them was safe. "It was near September, I think," Will began, sitting up a little bit. "The leaves on the trees were changing color and the forest floor was covered in them. The satisfyingly crunchy ones."

Hannibal could hear the smile in Will's voice and he tried to imagine a younger Will jumping into piles of leaves during the fall, but found that he couldn't exactly see it. Will wouldn't jump into piles, but he would stomp on leaves that were on the sidewalks. Hannibal could see that clearly. A small boy with untamed curls trapped under a beanie, with a coat and a scarf on, jumping down the sidewalk to try to obtain a crackle from each leaf present.

“I remember getting lost, going a little deeper into the woods than I normally did because I could hear water. I thought maybe I could find somewhere to go fishing,” Will said, licking at his lips. “I think I was about nine or ten.”

“How old is Walter?” Hannibal asked, doing his best not to break up this story. Will wouldn’t be telling it to him without a reason. It would all come back around full circle eventually.

“Eleven,” Will replied with a small nod as if confirming the information himself.

“What did you find in the forest Will?” Hannibal pressed, taking careful note the similarity in age.

“A man.” Will’s voice was significantly more sober now. “He was laying on the forest floor, bedded in reds and oranges. His face was so pale, the leaves so bright against his skin. He wasn’t that old. Maybe a teenager. Someone’s child left dead and forgotten in a forest in the middle of nowhere Michigan.”

“What did you do Will?”

Will was quiet for a moment, pulling away from Hannibal as if ashamed of whatever action he had taken decades ago. “I sat with him.”

“You didn’t tell anyone?”

Will shook his head, not glancing back at Hannibal, head hung low. “I didn’t want them to take him away from me.”

“Why?”

“Because of the stories his bones told me.” Will rubbed at the back of his neck. “Day after day I would go back, sit among the trees and listen to death work as the body slowly returned to the earth.”

“What happened to the body, Will?” Hannibal watched Will closely, not daring to touch him and drag him away from the tale he was weaving, because Hannibal understood. He knew the narratives that bones long forgotten could spin. He knew that if you were quiet enough, the dead would speak, just as alive as they ever had been. They just wanted someone to listen to their stories so they could be put to rest and if the story was right, Hannibal would listen.

“They found him.”

“It takes a long time for bodies to decompose in the cold,” Hannibal pointed out. “How long did you sit with him?”

“Months. I remember staying with him all night on Halloween, just staring at the moon, trying not to freeze as snow fell.”

“What happened when they found him?”

“I could see the police from the top of the hill and watched as they dug him out of the snow. I hadn’t visited him since there had been a pretty bad snowstorm. He was still mostly intact, still just as blue and pale as the day I had found him, though some of him had been eaten away by insects. I kept the animals away.”

“How did they find him?” Hannibal asked softly, hand reaching out and caressing Will’s arm. Will inhaled sharply and shook his head at Hannibal’s saving contact, sure he wouldn’t have been able to escape his mind if he kept going deeper.

“The killer confessed. It was his best friend that had killed him. They were playing with a gun and it went off.”

“Then he was given the burial that he deserved in the end,” Hannibal suggested as if that would make Will feel better. Hannibal knew it wouldn’t, but it was something to say, something to break up the delicate ice that hung in the room that needed to float downstream.

“He was... special to me,” Will said slowly, testing the words as they were said. “And I know that it’s wrong to feel protective over a corpse I didn’t know, but I was and I still feel like I was wounded when they took him from me, though he wasn’t mine.”

“I think you have always found comfort in death, Will. I think it shows you that you’re not alone,” Hannibal offered, pulling Will back towards him slowly, letting Will have enough time to pull free if he wanted to. But Will didn’t fight him. He was so easily moved any which way in Hannibal’s grasp, trusting that Hannibal always had his best interest at heart without any real reasoning behind it.

“Death makes me very alone,” Will argued with no fight in his tone as his back rested against Hannibal’s chest one more.

“It gives you a way to not be the black sheep of society. There are others out there who are worse than you and you are so empathetic to the victims that you have to take on their stories. You’re the only one who can listen to them, really listen and so they grasp you tightly. Bones thread such tantalizing tales that it captivates you and you can tell the world their stories.”

“I enjoy death because it makes me the center of attention?” Will asked softly, brows furrowed, head leaning back onto Hannibal’s shoulder, fingers tangling in Hannibal’s.

“You relate to death because it shows you that you’re not the most sick person in the room. You are equal. You are special. You have a story to be told just as the corpse you found told. You just want to be listened to.”

“Am I your corpse, Dr. Lecter?”

Hannibal’s voice was soft in Will’s ear, comforting in his melody. “How does Walter connect to this story? What do you see of yourself in him?”

“He wasn’t scared,” Will replied, thinking back on the phone call and all of his interactions with his son throughout the day. “He was a little shaken up on the phone, but when I got there, he was mostly fine. He didn’t want me to leave his side, but he said he was more worried about me than anything else.” Will bit his bottom lip, wincing at the fight he had had with Molly. “He was like me. I was about his age when I saw my first body. He stayed calm enough to call me and had enough sense to make sure that no one else entered the house.”

“You have influenced him greatly then. He looks up to you.”

“It’s not that,” Will stated with a shake of his head as his eyes drew patterns into the barely lit ceiling. “Is there something wrong with him? I know he’s not my biological son, but I don’t want him to end up like me.”

“A common concern for parents, Will,” Hannibal assured with a deep breath, releasing the pressure point for a moment. When Will didn’t tense up, Hannibal took it to mean that the migraine had finally passed and his now free hand went to caress Will’s curls. “We all want the next generation to be better than us, for a better future.”

“I suppose,” Will agreed, just letting himself feel Hannibal’s kind movements. “Are you sure you kill people?” Hannibal paused, frozen at the question. “You’re far too gentle. I’m finding it harder and harder to see you as the Chesapeake Ripper.”

“You’ve become too docile,” Hannibal said stiffly. “I would be more than happy to demonstrate myself to you if you are lacking in-”

“No.” Will shook his head. “I know what you are Hannibal. Every time I look into your eyes I can see the killer there, but you don’t show him to me.”

“Not at this moment in time,” Hannibal conceded, fingers going back to massaging into Will’s curls. “The moment isn’t right as of yet.”

“Someday then?”

“Someday.”

Will gave a nod and Hannibal watched at how easily Will’s chest rose and fell with his breathing, unbothered by the information he had been given. It made Hannibal all the more curious what Will could fully remember. There was no logical sense as to why Will should still be here with him. Not after everything that had happened. Will should have turned him over to Jack the moment he knew who Hannibal was, but the empath didn’t and Hannibal couldn’t, for the life of him, find the why.

“Is there anything else about this case that is bothering you? You still smell of stress.”

“What does stress smell like?” Will asked curiously, eyes flickering over to Hannibal’s face.

“Bitter.”

Will thought over the word for a moment before storing it away in his mind to analyze another day. “This last murder was different than the others. The others have all been committed within rich and strictly gated communities, families of six who have all recently come into money that they didn’t deserve in some way or another.”

“So, what changed?” Hannibal asked, hand leaving Will’s hair and dropping to his neck, resting naturally around Will’s throat, his pulse dancing against Hannibal’s open palm. Hannibal looked over Will’s form, waiting for the fight, but none came from Will. “So docile,” he whispered thoughtfully, letting his hand stay there, Will either not catching the comment or ignoring it.

“This wasn’t a gated community. They weren’t overly rich. Richer than me,” Will corrected, "but compared to their friends they would have been considered middle class.”

“Their friends are high society then?” Will gave a nod in answer. “But everything else was the same?”

“Other than my son being there, everything was the same. Walter was staying with a family. Supposedly they went out to breakfast after making plans and when they came back, the family was dead.”

“You don’t agree?” Hannibal questioned as Will tensed beneath him. His fingers stroked soothingly at Will’s neck for a moment before they once more fell still, holding Will’s fate back against his palm, vibrations tickling Hannibal’s fingers as Will spoke.

“Walter told me that the children, all of whom were very young, weren't awake when they left. Children get up on Saturdays. I would watch cartoons every Saturday before having to go to work with my dad. Walter gets up before us and plays video games with his friends. It’s not until they’re teenagers that they start sleeping in until noon, not caring if they’re dead to the world.”

“So, Walter thinks they were dead before they went to breakfast,” Hannibal said with interest in his tone. “What else did he notice Will?”

“That his friend’s parents were lying about when they obtained their cat.”

“A cat?” Hannibal asked. “I don’t think Freddie Lounds has given me much insight into a cat.”

Will groaned and sat up with no fight from the grip around his neck, looking back at Hannibal. “Please don’t tell me you read that shit too.”

“Language, Will. It’s not very flattering on you,” Hannibal scolded lightly, causing Will to frown slightly. “As tasteless as her journalism might be, she often gives the best accounts of your cases.” Will huffed a curl from his eyes in annoyance and Hannibal smiled. “What is so important about the cat?”

“The first scene I worked, the killer was injured. The woman fought back, scratched her killer. Walter’s friend’s parents fit the profile. Jordan had scratched down one of his arms that he kept trying to hide from me. Said they were from their cat, but Walter said they didn’t have their cat when that happened.”

“So you think it’s Walter’s friend’s family that is doing this?”

“I-I don’t know,” Will admitted. “My gut is saying yes, but the evidence isn’t clear enough. It points to them, but they have an alibi for this morning. They were out of the house when the murders could have been committed. My son was with them. He’s their alibi.”

“What else was weird about this, Will?” Hannibal continued to push in his normal way, trying to pull Will’s mind from the tiny details until he could see the big picture. “What does this crime tell you that the others didn’t?”

“That...” Will trailed off, closing his eyes. Hannibal was quiet, watching the flittering expressions that crossed Will’s face as he thought back on the day. “That these people knew the killers, but that’s not different. Each family knew the killers. They have never forced their way into these homes. They’re trusted.”

“Then why does this one stick out?”

“It’s more personal,” Will finally landed on, eyes opening. “The other killings have been about purging witches consumed by evil and demons from this life. This family fell into that category, but they were different. I can’t place what made them different. They came into money and were braggy about it, but I don’t think they were quite as possessed as they thought the other families were. It was almost as if they were annoyed with this family more than seeing them as evil.”

“One should always, when given the chance, eat the rude,” Hannibal said, head tipped to the side, waiting for Will’s reaction.

“You know, your reasoning for your killings is so much more straightforward than what the FBI has been trying to find,” Will commented, turning so he was on his knees, legs straddling either side of Hannibal’s, and so he could look over Hannibal fully. “So simple.”

“Killing doesn’t need to be complicated,” Hannibal replied with a small wave of his hand. “Only beautiful.”

“You’re beautiful.”

Hannibal blinked, eyes meeting tempra blue oceans. Will always said such confounding endearments at always the most inopportune times and it never failed to catch Hannibal off guard. It didn’t show on his features much, a slight twitch of lips, flickering of eyes, but he always felt it cut into him deeply.

Will’s compliments had been the only ones that Hannibal had ever found truth in. He wasn’t coercing them out of someone, manipulating them to love him with his charm so he could use them how he wanted. Will was never that. Will was only ever honest, even in his betrayal, he was honest.

And Will’s kisses were breathtaking, in a very literal sense. One that Hannibal had never experienced before Will. And maybe it was because he knew that nothing relationship wise had ever been a two way street. Everything was one way into a dead end brick wall that he would avoid and watch the other person crash into head on.

But now he found himself ready to hit that wall alone, even if Will were watching him do it, because Will was real. Will was tangible. Will was solid and concrete and was love. Or at least that was what Hannibal had called it. He wasn’t sure what else to name it, though love didn’t feel like quite enough for what they were. It was more than that, deeper than that, unfathomable to anyone outside of them.

A white hot pain in Hannibal’s torso that reminded him of when he had received the brand against his back caused him to wince and pull away from the kiss. Will jumped back, the hand that had placed itself against Hannibal’s stomach ripping back.

“I-I’m sorry!” Will said quickly, voice far more broken than Hannibal thought it needed to be.

Hannibal held up a hand to silence him, the other clenched around his middle. “It’s ok,” he got out with a pained breath. “You did nothing wrong.”

“Can- Is- What can I do?” Will stuttered, a hand reaching and hovering for a moment before dropping back into the mattress, afraid of making things worse. “How can I help you?”

“Hush, silly boy,” Hannibal ordered softly, trying to give Will a kind smile though it came off more like a grimace. “I’m still healing. I’ll be alright.”

“I thought your knee was hurt.” Will sat back on his heels, hands taking fistfuls of the sheets under him.

“Would you like to see?” Hannibal asked, straightening himself back up with a deep breath, eyes closed tightly, head against the backboard of the bed as he willed the burning to dissipate. When there was no answer, he opened his eyes to find Will watching him, concern still over his features, etched into the shadows of his cheeks. Hannibal gave him a half smile. "Silly boy.”

“See?” Will asked, voice still cracked. Hannibal pulled up the hem of his sweater over his body until two scars were showing. One from his sternum down, the other down a little lower by his hip. Will’s hand reached out once more and before he could pull it back, Hannibal seized his wrist and brought Will’s fingers to the surgical scar. “I-I...” Will trailed off at Hannibal’s pointed gaze and let his fingers explore the marking in the man’s skin. “What did you have done?”

“I had an infection that needed to be cleaned out and some internal bleeding,” Hannibal replied, eyes closing as he felt rough worked, calloused fingers trace over his injuries as soft as falling snow.

“How did that happen?” Will questioned, fingers moving over to the other scar, one that he recognized. He had a similar one on his arm from when Jack had shot him. Why had Jack shot him?

“You don’t remember,” Hannibal said softly, not in question, just in acknowledgment, eyes still closed. “I got shot and had to perform surgery on myself after a particularly nasty fall. I probably didn’t clean it well enough. And then we got into a fight. You punched me and it opened everything back up again.” Hannibal gave a small laugh, keeping Will’s fingers on his skin as Will tried to pull free.

Will winced, a sharpness returning to his head at the picture of Hannibal pouring himself a glass of wine only to have the wine bottle shatter, spilling the dark liquid and green glass across the floor. Hannibal dropped and the glass window behind him showered down to show a man step into the home that Will couldn't exactly place remembering having arrived at.

Hannibal watched as Will’s face twisted into one of pain and his breath faltered. Hannibal released his hold on Will and the man clutched at both sides of his head as if there was someone trying to hack him apart with an axe.

Hannibal waited, allowing the memory to come back to Will fully. He had seen this happen too many times to count and it was better to let Will come back on his own than try to pull him from his mind.

Will began to shiver and Hannibal reached out with careful hands, guiding Will back against him, pulling the blanket around the empath who shook violently in his grasp. He caressed Will’s curl’s as time seemed to stretch on for an eternity before Will inhaled deeply, words running from his mouth like a fountain.

“I-I tried to-I tried to kill us,” he gasped out, hands taking fistfuls of Hannibal’s sweater. Hannibal simply shushed Will, keeping him held tightly at his side, unsure if the man would try to attack him again or not. “We fell. The ocean was so cold. So cold.”

“You’re safe now,” Hannibal assured Will as Will hid his face into Hannibal’s chest. “It’s alright.”

“You stopped breathing,” Will whimpered. “You were dead.”

“Will,” Hannibal said firmly, hands taking the sides of Will’s face and forcing the empath to look up. “Will, look at me.” Blue eyes were unfocused, distant, trapped in the past, replaying it over and over again. “Will, look at me.” Those blue eyes met Hannibal’s but there was nothing in them to say that Will was present. “Will, tell me your name, where are you?”

“There was a lighthouse,” Will whispered. “You called it The Watching Star. You hid us there, kept me safe.”

“Will, that’s enough,” Hannibal ordered. “Come back to me now. Don’t get lost in yourself.”

“You said the Watching Star would protect me while you were away.” Will frowned, eyes flickering about, trying to see something that wasn’t there. “Where did you always go?”

“Will.” Hannibal gave Will a shake and Will jumped, eyes focusing back in on Hannibal with a terrified light in them. “What is your name?”

“My name is Will Graham,” Will recited, hands reaching up to clasped over Hannibal’s who still held his face tightly. “I am in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania with Dr. Hannibal Lector.”

“Good,” Hannibal muttered, one of his hands pushing curls from Will’s face. Will’s eyes slid closed and Hannibal frowned. “Do not lose yourself, Will. Stay here, stay present with me.”

Will shook his head and weakly pushed Hannibal’s hands away, laying back against Hannibal’s chest. “I don’t remember everything,” he muttered, voice nearing the edge of sleep. “I still have no memory of you before falling.” Hannibal glanced down at Will, unsure of what exactly to offer him for comfort. “And just the lighthouse. Nothing after.”

“Will...”

“Hold me, Hannibal. Please. Don’t let me go.”

“*Kaip nori, gražus berniukas*.”

Hannibal’s arms circled around Will, holding the trembling empath, one hand gently brushing fingers over Will’s cheek. Will’s hands returned to making fists in Hannibal’s knit sweater, searching for anything stable to hold onto, something bedrock in Will’s very shifting sands.

“Keep talking?” he asked softly, able to feel the curiosity in Hannibal’s grip. “Your voice is comforting.”

“Would you like me to read to you?” Hannibal reached over to the bedside table and picked up the book he had been reading. He would do anything to help Will and this wasn’t an unnatural thing for the man to ask for. He asked to be read to constantly when he was in good moods.

Will gave a small nod. “As long as it’s not in English. I don’t want to understand. I just want to feel your words.”

Hannibal placed the book aside, not in the mood to try to translate the English text into anything else at the moment, more concerned about Will. He closed his eyes, digging through libraries of stories in his mind, ones he had read over and over endless times, and he always seemed to come back to Dante. It was always Dante that left his tongue.

“*Ad ogni cuore che il dolce dolore muove,*” Hannibal started in a soft voice, leaning over to turn off the bedside lamp and immersing them in a gentle darkness. He lifted Will up enough that he could rest back into the bed and pulled him back in, Will curling into his side naturally. “*E a cui queste parole possono ora essere portate*.”

“Italian?” Will questioned, breath hot where it landed against Hannibal’s neck.

“*Si*.” Hannibal’s hand trailed down Will’s bare arm, tracing patterns there. “*Stai migliorando nel riconoscere le lingue.*”

“That book you left me with, I know it was you,” Will began and when Hannibal didn’t say anything, Will frowned. “Please don’t stop talking. I’m merely thinking aloud.”

“*Come desideri, bellissimo ragazzo.*” Hannibal let his eyes close as he found his mental bookmark and continued on in the sonnet he was quoting. “*Per una vera interpretazione e un pensiero gentile.*”

“It’s all in Italian,” Will said, sighing as Hannibal’s fingers tangled into his hair. “I was trying to translate some of it.”

“*Siate saluti nel nome del nostro Signore, che è Amore.*”

“Is this Dante?”

“*Si Amore mio*.”

“I can tell by the way the stanzas are phrased,” Will said, voice holding a little more life in it now that his body had stopped shaking. “You used to read him to me.”

“*Che ragazzo astuto sei.*” It felt nearly natural now to take in everything Will was saying in English and quickly flip an answer back out to him in Italian. Hannibal didn’t have to devote much thought to the process, just let the words flow from him, surprised at how easy it had become even if he were mixing real answers with lines of poetry. “*Di quelle lunghe ore in cui le stelle, in alto*.”

“It’s something foggy like a dream.” Will pressed his lips into Hannibal’s neck, inhaling deeply of wine and trees through the kiss. “A cabin, a fireplace, curled up on a couch lazily.”

“*Svegliati e veglia, la terza era quasi nulla, Quando l'amore mi è stato mostrato con tali terrori irto*.” Hannibal let himself slip into the warmth of Will against him, doing his best to keep his mind present and on the book he mentally held. Normally he could keep multiple trains of thought going at a time, but with Will’s assaults and the pleasant scent of rain from the empath’s skin, no longer soiled by bitter stress, Hannibal was finding it difficult to keep track of all of his trains. “*Come non si può parlare con noncuranza.*”

“I think I picked up a little bit of it. It came easily to me, but I guess I went to Italy. We were there for a while, weren’t we?” Will asked before he dragged down the collar of Hannibal’s sweater and kissed at the dip where his neck met his collarbone, feeling the killer’s breath hitch and wondering if he was the only one who could do this to Hannibal or if there had been others.

“*Sì, siamo stati a Firenze per un po ',*” Hannibal answered, mind going blank for a moment as he tried to recall anyone else having kissed him like this. It always seemed that he was the one in charge, the one doing everything because he had to be in control. But with Will, there was enough trust between them that Hannibal didn’t feel the need to be in control every second of the day. He was content with Will owning some part of him and Hannibal supposed that maybe that was all he had ever wanted. Someone to hold some part of him so that he could have the chance to relax and be cherished fully and completely. “*Sembrava uno che è pieno di gioia, e lo era, Il mio cuore nella sua mano e sul suo braccio*,” Hannibal pressed on, finding just enough of himself through the fog to focus back in on the task that was asked of him.

“You’ll have to take me back to Florence someday, Hannibal,” Will said with an admiring sigh. “So I can remember it again.”

“*Devi solo chiedere, dolce ragazzo.*”

“I seem to recall at some point, and this might have been one of the many dreams of you that I have, that you said anything was mine as long as I asked.” Will’s teeth grazed over Hannibal’s collarbone, causing the older man to shiver and Will to grin. “Did you promise me everything, Hannibal?”

“*Sì. Qualunque cosa nel mondo è tua.*”

“I want to see Venice too.” Will pulled back from Hannibal slightly to look over the man in the dark, the moonlight escaping through the curtains making Hannibal’s cheekbones look sharp enough to cut glass. “And France. And Monaco. Switzerland and Germany and Russia. Take me to see the world, Hannibal.”

“*Quando il mondo ci avrà dimenticato, allora te lo mostrerò.*”

“Your tongue is beautiful.” Will sat up a little more and pressed a kiss to those cheekbones, feeling the firmness beneath the skin. “Please keep going.”

“*La mia signora, con un mantello intorno, dormiva; Chi dopo averla svegliata fece subito,”* Hannibal obeyed, Will’s fingers sending a shudder through him as they clasped around his throat with a non-threatening manner. “*Per mangiare quel cuore; mangiava, temendo di nuocere.*” The fingers at his neck took his jaw and forced his head towards Will. Hannibal’s eyes flickered open, a glassiness to them that Will had never seen before. “*Poi è uscito; e mentre andava, pianse*,” Hannibal finished, voice barely audible. “*Baciami*.”

“*Mi lusinghi così tanto con le tue parole, disse il trono, che non posso fare a meno di accettare ciò che mi chiedi, anche se spero di non essere troppo lungo e di stancarti con le mie difficoltà*,” Will quoted in a whisper, placing a kiss to Hannibal’s surprised lips.

“I could never tire of you,” Hannibal muttered, mind too muddled to try to speak Italian any longer, English only slightly easier from having to speak it so often. But even English was wiped away at another kiss, languid but sweet.

* * *

A phone call was once again what woke Will, though the room was still dark. Will squinted at the brightness of the phone screen as he tried to answer the call without waking up Hannibal. The man stirred lightly, turning away from Will and the brightness of the phone.

“Hello?” Will asked with a gravelly voice, breathing hard as he fell back against the pillow.

“Dad?”

“Wally, what’s wrong?” Will sat up and pushed the blankets from him, sitting on the edge of the bed and rubbing at his tired eyes. He pulled the phone back and checked the time. It was only two in the morning. He had only been asleep for an hour or two. He placed the phone back to his ear.

“You didn’t say the nightmares would be this bad.”

Will blinked several times and sighed. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“How do you deal with it?” Walter inhaled shakily and Will could hear something shifting in the background. “Shh, Izzy. Go back to sleep.”

“Are the dogs alright? I’m surprised your mother took Izzy and Winston. They’re a bit of a handful together,” Will stated, getting to his feet and rubbing at the back of his neck.

“They’re fine. Izzy won’t leave my side though. Still doesn’t like mom. You didn’t answer my question, dad.”

Will began pacing the room with a small frown. “You find distractions and you try to sleep again. You can’t be afraid of sleep even if monsters are waiting there. Unrestful sleep is better than none at all. Do you understand?”

“Izzy misses you,” Walter said in answer, finding his distraction. “Always gets excited when someone comes to the door and then races off when it's not you.”

“I’m sorry I’m not there like I’m supposed to be.” Will felt the small shred of guilt pull in his chest, noticing how often all of his emotions gathered right there, threatening to choke him.

“Dad, I get it. It’s alright. You’re here now and that’s all that matters.”

Will gave a nod to no one in particular and sat down on the edge of the bed in an odd mix of fully awake and wanting nothing more than to sink back into the bed to sleep for a hundred years. He inhaled deeply as a hand took his shoulder and he glanced back at Hannibal who had a curious glint in his eyes.

“Dad, are you going to catch them?”

“I’m doing my very best,” Will answered, letting Hannibal wrap his arms around him. “They have a pattern of 13s. There should only be one more attack hopefully.”

“And you’re going to stop that.”

“I will stop that,” Will agreed firmly.

“You really think that it’s Casey and Jordan, don’t you?”

Will bit his bottom lip. He had been living with a serial killer next to him for years and hadn’t noticed it until he was locked up for murders that he didn’t commit. Hannibal had pulled the wool over everyone’s eyes, Will included. And maybe it was Will’s own fault for wanting to finally have a connection with someone, and Hannibal had been that connection. It was just the same now. He slept in the same bed as a mass murderer and it was the most sound sleep he had ever had and he hadn’t even so much as considered telling Jack where Hannibal was, though he knew the man was going to lose it if the Ripper wasn’t caught soon.

“I can be wrong.”

“You’re never wrong,” Walter pointed out. “It’s the only thing that makes logical sense after all. They were there, the cat doesn’t add up, Jordan did have scratches down his arm. But Jordan really doesn’t like blood,” Walter mused thoughtfully.

“I’m not sure your mother would approve of you thinking about things so morbid.”

“It’s because of you I do,” Walter stated with a small laugh, obviously feeling better. “Jordan nearly fainted when we just told him what had happened. It was nearly funny, if the situation had been different,” he quickly added.

“Are you doing ok now?” Will asked around a yawn, using his elbow to push Hannibal away at a kiss against his cheek. A smile came to Will’s lips.

“Yeah. Thanks Dad.”

“You’re welcome. Night kid.”

“Night Dad.”

Will lowered his phone with a sigh. “I didn’t mean to wake you. I’m sorry.”

“No need,” Hannibal assured. “So, they only have one more family to kill.” It wasn’t a question, but Will still answered it with a nod. “Are you going to be able to catch them?”

“If I can’t before this one, then I’m not sure if I’ll have another chance. If they really do stop at 13, then they will fade away into nothing. They don’t leave behind any DNA and the DNA we think we found is still being tested. We don’t know if one of them really was scratched. The skin under the woman’s nails could belong to herself. She had clenched her fists.”

Hannibal gave an understanding nod, quickly changing the subject. “How is your head? You don’t seem to be in much pain.”

“It’s a little raw, but not bad.” Will turned back to face Hannibal fully with a small smile. “Why did you always leave when we were by the lighthouse?” Hannibal shook his head and gave a sad sort of smile that Will had never seen the man use before, one that didn’t fit him in the slightest. Will’s hand reached out and he took Hannibal’s face, calling those maroon eyes to his, for once wanting to see what secrets Hannibal was keeping from him.

Those red eyes held all manners of extremes deep in them. Passion, seduction, violence, danger, anger, adventure and blood. So much blood. His sister’s, his own, victim’s and Will’s, Will’s being the brightest out of any of the others, something far more scarlet than merlot. Will pushed past that, searching further down before he finally came up with his answer.

“You thought you were going to die,” he whispered, watching the small amount of amusement playing in Hannibal’s gaze.

“Such a cunning boy you are.”

“Where were you going to die?” Will asked curiously, releasing his hold on Hannibal and quickly letting his eyes look anywhere but at Hannibal’s. He didn’t need to dig any deeper, be sucked into a dark hole where he wouldn’t be able to return. He didn’t need to know all of Hannibal’s secrets.

Not yet, anyways. There would be time for them to share secrets later. They would always have their time.

“At first it was near the ocean,” Hannibal answered with a deep breath. “Horribly poetic of me, I know. But then I thought about what would happen to you if I did die on the cliffside. No one would know where to look for you. So then I started hanging around police stations with a note in my pocket to let people know where you were. But as fate would have it, you haven’t killed me yet, though I can’t say you lack in the effort of attempts.”

“The fire,” Will whispered, a hand going to his head. “I thought that was a nightmare.”

“Very real, I’m afraid.”

“I’m sorry Hannibal.”

“Do not be sorry, silly boy.”

Kaip nori, gražus berniukas

As you wish, beautiful boy

Ad ogni cuore che il dolce dolore muove E a cui queste parole possono ora essere portate. Per una vera interpretazione e un pensiero gentile. Siate saluti nel nome del nostro Signore, che è Amore Di quelle lunghe ore in cui le stelle, in alto. Svegliati e veglia, la terza era quasi nulla, Quando l'amore mi è stato mostrato con tali terrori irto Come non si può parlare con noncuranza? Sembrava uno che è pieno di gioia, e lo era, Il mio cuore nella sua mano e sul suo braccio La mia signora, con un mantello intorno, dormiva; Chi dopo averla svegliata fece subito Per mangiare quel cuore; mangiava, temendo di nuocere. Poi è uscito; e mentre andava, pianse.

To each heart that sweet pain moves And to whom these words can now be brought. For true interpretation and kind thinking. For true interpretation and kind thinking Greetings in the name of our Lord, who is Love Of those long hours in which the stars, above. Wake up and wake, the third was almost nothing, When love was shown to me with such terrors fraught How can you not speak casually? He looked like someone who is full of joy, and he was, My heart in his hand and on his arm My lady, with a cloak around her, was sleeping; Who after waking her did immediately To eat that heart; he ate, afraid of doing harm. Then he went out; and as he went he wept.

Si.- Yes

Stai migliorando nel riconoscere le lingue.- You are getting better at recognizing languages.

Come desideri, bellissimo ragazzo- As you wish, beautiful boy

Si Amore mio- Yes my love

Che ragazzo astuto sei- What a smart boy you are

Sì, siamo stati a Firenze per un po '- Yes, we had been in Florence for a while

Devi solo chiedere, dolce ragazzo- You just have to ask, sweet boy

Sì. Qualunque cosa nel mondo è tua.-Yes. Everything in the world is yours

Quando il mondo ci avrà dimenticato, allora te lo mostrerò- When the world has forgotten us, then I'll show you

Baciami.- Kiss me

Mi lusinghi così tanto con le tue parole, disse il trono, che non posso fare a meno di accettare ciò che mi chiedi, anche se spero di non essere troppo lungo e di stancarti con le mie difficoltà-

You flatter me so much with your words, said the throne, that I cannot help but accept what you ask of me, although I hope not to be too long and to tire you with my difficulties

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again to my sister and my wonderful beta, @PitaGonzalezMe on twitter.

Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Save her!
“Put your head back.”
Damn it Hannibal!
“Close your eyes.”
Save her, you monster!
“Wade into the quiet of the stream.”
Save her!

Losing You
Terrifies Me

“You can nearly bend your knee at a 90 degree angle. That’s pretty impressive. Most patients your age don’t get the full range of motion back,” Liam announced, pushing on Hannibal’s knee at an uncomfortable angle, but Hannibal stayed quiet. “And how has walking on it been?”

“Stiff,” Hannibal replied only because he had to, not because he wanted to.

“Your muscles are also looking good. They’re strong. It still needs a little bit of work, but I’ve seen marines with your injury and they had hardly any muscle left in their legs. They have to build it all back up.” Liam released Hannibal’s knee and looked over the killer for a moment, taking in his countenance. “You seem in a better mood.”

“I suppose exercise was a help,” Hannibal grumbled, more wanting to be left alone than prodded at. He knew what his body was capable of, but he also knew that Liam would do whatever he could to get money.

Liam hummed in disbelief, motioning for Hannibal to lift his shirt to look over the scarring that was there. Fingers pressed into and around the scarring and Hannibal closed his eyes in dislike. “You’re still a little sensitive. The scaring seems a little agitated. Did you hurt yourself?”

“Had a bit of weight put on it on accident,” Hannibal explained, not offering any more than that. Liam didn’t need to know about his private affairs. No one needed to. “I would have called on you if it were serious.”

Liam shook his head with a smug smile. “No you wouldn’t have.” Liam, satisfied with whatever he did or didn’t find, straightened up and Hannibal lowered his shirt. “Let’s take a walk around the room. I want to make sure you’re functioning alright.”

Hannibal didn’t fight, simply rose from the bed, his leg a little weak under him, the knee shaking slightly until it had become accustomed to the weight now being put on it. The pace set was a little slow, but nothing excruciating as it had been when he was trying to figure the crutches.

It felt freeing to not have to depend on anything anymore and to keep up a steady step around the rather large bedroom that Alana and Margot had let him use. He felt like he could walk to the stables without having to stop to rest his arms and the leg that had been supporting him for nearly the last month. He could cook a full meal without having to hop on one foot like a rabbit. He could leave and run far away. He could escape from Jack and Alana and Margot and all of the other people that hated him, the list was extensive.

But would Will come with him?

He didn’t want to leave if it meant not taking the empath with him. He was sure Will would say no, even if he had begged to be shown the world, which was something Hannibal was more than willing to do for the man. Will wasn’t one to throw caution to the wind and Will was very nearly settled back into his life, save a few minor drawbacks.

Hannibal couldn’t stay here for much longer. He knew that. He was already well acquainted with the idea and he ran before. From Florence to Baltimore. He could go anywhere he wanted or needed to. He always stayed in cooler climates. Maybe somewhere on a beach would be nice for a change.

He could leave Will. He would have to leave Will. It was something he would have to get more than acquainted with. And he had left Will before, though it drove him nearly insane. He almost felt bad for what he had done to Anthony Dimmond. Almost being the key word.

The man who looked too close to Will's appearance for his own good. A man who had flirted with Hannibal the moment they had met. A man who Hannibal couldn't bring himself to kill at dinner, but had the next time after his secret was uncovered. Hannibal could have played Dimmon, strung him along so easily. He was such a flirt. Seduction would have been easy, but Hannibal felt like it would betray Will in some way, though that wasn't logical in the slightest.

And so he turned Dimmond into his pain, into his barely beating heart that had been run through with swords. He created art from his tortured being and then it wasn't enough. He didn't care for art after that. It was a matter of necessity with Dimmond and Hannibal took his time, but with Professor Sogliato and Roman Fell, those had been impulsive. He could have had any job, but Roman infuriated him and deserved his concrete bed and Sogilato was arrogant in the highest caliper. It didn't take much for Hannibal to flip and drive the icepick deep into the man's head. Afterall, he had been rude.

Hannibal was almost worried that he would fall into the same depression that he had back then. It had felt so good to see Will in the Norman Chapel in Palermo. It had brought just enough light back into his bones for him to survive, his appetite sated for a time.

Hannibal had been fine before Will Graham and he would be fine after Will Graham. He didn't need Will Graham in his life, but he wanted Will Graham in his life.

"Dr. Lecter, it looks like there is a storm raging inside of you," Liam interrupted, causing Hannibal to blink and slam back into himself and where he was inside of his room. Stopped beside one of the many large windows, staring out of it at the bare trees whose branches shook in the wind. "Are you in pain? You stopped walking a while ago."

"Not any pain that is physical," Hannibal replied, quickly turning away from the window to continue in the exercise, but a hand on his shoulder kept him in place.

"When was the last time you saw Will Graham?"

Liam could only smile as Hannibal seemed to stutter to a stop, only for a few seconds before he quickly collected himself to answer as flawlessly as he ever did. "I do not see how that is pertinent to my recovery."

"I would like to think that exercise was not the only thing that pulled you from your depressive state. Alana tells me that you're positively radiant when Will comes to visit, which is apparently more often than naught. She tells me that she sees his car on the street at night sometimes, though he never comes to the door. Margot says that she can hear poetry being read from this room late at night. I saw you as a romantic, Dr. Lecter, but not a hopeless one."

That kept Hannibal's mouth shut tight, the silence telling Liam more than any words Hannibal gave him ever would. Liam released his hold on Hannibal and the man began walking again, stance stunningly steady for the loop that Liam had knocked him for.

"So what poetry do you read for him, Dr. Lecter?" Liam pressed, enjoying the way he could toy with the Killer who was in no state to do anything but bite back with a collar to hold teeth at bay. Liam was surprised that he got an answer at all as he trailed lazily after the doctor.

“Dante mostly.”

“I’m more of a Faust man myself,” Liam threw out, hoping to keep this conversation going as long as Hannibal was willing to participate. It was always welcome when Liam learned any new information about the man bathed in an enigma. “*Wer den Teufel hält, der soll ihn gut halten, er wird kaum ein zweites Mal erwischt*.”

“*Der Teufel, er ist alt, werden Sie selbst alt, und er wird Sinn machen!*” Hannibal quoted back, catching Liam off guard.

“Of course you would know Faust,” Liam said, smile growing. “Are you calling yourself old?”

“Am I the devil?”

“Very nearly, I would suppose,” Liam answered teasingly. Hannibal glanced over his shoulder at Liam for a fraction of a second before coming to stop at another window where Alana was standing, watching her son play with the dog. “You didn’t argue. Did you take that as a compliment?”

“A rather high one, coming from someone such as yourself.”

Liam looked over, unsure whether to take that as a compliment or an insult and he wondered if anyone could tell if Hannibal was insulting them. Maybe Will Graham could.

Hannibal had his head tipped to the side, eyes hooked on the young boy. Curious. Did Hannibal like the kid? As annoyed as the air Hannibal put on was whenever the child was around, Hannibal played the role of gentle caregiver underneath the annoyance. Hannibal enjoyed the child’s company, it being much more favorable over Margot or Alana’s, or at least Liam assumed that. The child was wickedly brilliant for being no more than five and Liam was sure that Hannibal enjoyed the odd quirk of the kid’s point of view.

Liam had been present for several conversations while attending to Dr. Lecter, the kid more than able to hold his own against the much older and more versed man. Liam nodded his head as if answering himself. Hannibal liked the kid, but he would never openly admit to it.

“Have you ever been a father, Dr. Lecter?” Liam questioned, causing the man beside him to stiffen up and turn his back to the window. “You have a very paternal aura about you.”

“I guess you could say I had a daughter for a time.” Hannibal started back for his bed, stride still remarkably strong.

“And what happened to her?”

Hannibal sat down on the edge of the bed with a sigh, hand going to rub at the scarring on his knee, the scarring probably being tight from healing itself. “There was no longer a place for her in this world. So I made one for her in the next.”

“You killed her.”

“I showed her a mercy far kinder than anything the world would have shown her,” Hannibal defended, yet another surprise to Liam.

Liam's brows furrowed as he tried to make sense of the words he was given to work with. "You did it to spare her, not to harm her."

"More or less." Hannibal reached out for his ice pack, laid back against the headboard of the bed and placed the pack on his knee with a deep exhale.

"More or less?" Liam pushed, propping a pillow up under Hannibal's knee.

"It was to protect her as much as it was to hurt Will Graham."

Liam found himself sitting on the edge of the bed, his knees collapsing under him at the free admissions he was getting out of Hannibal and he wasn't sure if Hannibal had some other sort of end game and was playing with him on purpose, or if Hannibal was being genuine. "You wanted to hurt Will Graham?"

"He hurt me. *Quid pro quo*."

"That sounds more like and eye for an eye."

"It's possible," Hannibal agreed, eyes closing. "I would like to rest now, if you don't mind Dr. Jefferies. As you said, I was spouting poetry well into the night."

The knock on the door came early and Will sighed, taking a sip of his mug of hurriedly poured, too hot coffee, before going to the front door that was oldy quiet without the dogs there to bark at it.

He pulled it open and was met with a face he didn't recognize of a man in his twenties. "Hello?" he asked in confusion.

"Are you Will Graham?" the man asked boredly, looking like he wanted to be anywhere but here.

"Yes?" Will answered slowly, looking down as a large manila envelope was held out to him. He hesitantly took it, looking over it with a frown.

"You've been served. Good day."

Before Will could even open his mouth to speak, the young man turned away and left Will standing in his doorway, letting the heat escape into the cold winter morning. Of all of the things he had expected to experience on a day like today, this was absolutely not one of them.

He closed the door and opened the envelope, pulling free the mass of paperwork in it, going in search of his glasses by his now unwanted cup of coffee, so that he could read every word.

It didn't take long for him to put the pieces together. Divorce papers. It was official now. They hadn't been separated long enough for a non-fault divorce and it was very clear that after what had happened with Walter's short lived weekend, Molly wanted Will as far away from her and her child as she could.

Adultery was the cause for the fault, and though Molly wasn't incorrect, she had no proof. It would be hard for her to prove that he was with a serial killer who was on the run and hadn't been seen or heard from since a phone call made to one FBI Agent Jack Crawford. At least she didn't paint him in the light of abuser or cruelty or desertion. It would have been easy enough for her to weave the story. Will had violent tendencies. Hannibal's notes had made sure that was brought to light.

The agreement was fairly logical and though it was fair, it pissed Will off. Molly was nothing but fair, but he couldn't help the anger boiling up inside of him as he tried to somehow hold onto the semblance of a life that might have never really truly existed in the first place. A life he had faked through until now, where he felt more himself than he had in a long time.

He never knew himself as well as he did when he was with Hannibal. It was a terrifying notion, but one that was true nonetheless.

With a deep breath Will found himself staring at the custody section. Molly, in her clear cut handwriting, had outlined exactly what she expected to be done with Walter. Gone were the niceties of Walter wanting to see him and all there was were the clinical words telling Will that she didn't want Will to have anything to do with the kid.

But he had his rights, no matter how slim they were. He had adopted Walter. He had as much legal claim over him as Molly did, whether she liked it or not. He would at least get supervised visits, unless the court could claim something absolutely ridiculous about him, but then again... There was plenty they could use against him. Randall Tier being one of them, and if the Great Red Dragon was ever found, then Will was positive that it would be another, though he couldn't quite remember him. Not to mention that he had been hard labeled as a serial killer by the FBI for a good year.

Will exhaled deeply and collapsed onto the couch, arm over his eyes. He wasn't even sure who to reach out to, to try to get a lawyer set up. Molly wouldn't have screwed his chances by contacting every law office in the state, would she? No. That didn't seem like something that Molly would do. But Will wasn't so sure anymore. Had he ever really known Molly to begin with or had his person suit blinded him? Not even his person suit, just the idea that someone might like him, the first someone since Hannibal. And Hannibal hadn't even been the ruin of this relationship that he had been to all of his others.

There was no killing, there was no alienating, there was no trying to pull him away. Hannibal had let him go, let him receive the medical treatment that he needed and made no attempt to find him. Hannibal would have already known where Will was, but he didn't interrupt. Even if he was injured, he could have found a way to Will. The man's resources were endless, fail safes built into every aspect of his life. Hannibal had released him without a fight and Will had been the one to crawl back, desperate. He was the one who had sought him out and maybe Hannibal found joy in that, Will wasn't sure. And maybe Will had been trained well, but for once it wasn't Hannibal manipulating him, it was Will choosing for himself.

"What are you going to do about this?"

Will didn't bother looking up at the rustle of paper. "What am I supposed to do about it?" Will asked softly to the open room that no one else was present in.

"Aren't you going to fight it?"

"Only for my son, Abby."

The couch dipped near Will's head and he lifted his arm away to see Abigail's face surrounded by a curtain of her dark hair. She sat on the arm of the couch, bare feet on either side of Will's head, elbows on her knees and face held boredly in her hands. "I don't think anyone would be upset if you ran away."

“Ran away?” Will asked softly, trying to blink Abigail out of existence. He didn’t want to have this discussion with himself, even if it was through Abigail’s mouth and sometimes her words, or Beverly’s, were much easier to hear than his own. “I’m not going to run away.”

“Why not? That was always the plan, wasn’t it?” Abigail asked with a shrug. “The three of us were going to run away together. Why has that changed now?”

“Because I have a family now.”

A frown covered her plush lips as a glower took over her face. “We were a family,” she grumbled, moving from the couch and stepping around the coffee table, hands out to balance her as she walked heel to toe like in a sobriety test. A test that Will had taken part in from both sides of it before. How long ago that felt now. “Didn’t you want to be my family?”

Will sat up, feeling a stab of guilt in his chest, a never ending guilt for losing Abigail, though he still couldn’t remember it happening. “Of course,” he answered in an airy sort of way. “I had never wanted anything more.”

“We could have been such a happy family, the three of us. Hannibal, you and me.”

“He didn’t run,” Will whispered, the feeling of a memory beginning to pull unbearingly at the edge of his mind.

“Foggy and Familiar,” Abigail said softly into the living room, attention now more focused on the hem of her summer dress that looked to have a tear in it. Will glanced over the girl, finding mud on her knees and between her toes, the bottom of her summer dress wet and dripping onto the floor.

“He was supposed to run. I told him to go.”

“We were never meant to leave you behind. He made a place for us.”

“You were both supposed to run,” Will pressed, nearly hearing Abigail crying in Hannibal’s kitchen. He watched Abigail shake and shutter, having a conversation with someone who wasn’t in the room, someone who Will could see.

“I didn’t know what else to do,” she gasped out, voice broken. “So I just did what he told me.”

“Foggy and familiar,” her voice said in his ear and Will jumped, looking back at Abigail still in her dripping wet sundress as she watched from beside Will, on the couch, her own self, now in a green jacket and jeans, play out some long suppressed memory.

“Where is he?” Will asked, getting from the couch and stepping closer to the Abigail in front of him, the words coming from him like they had been preordained to slip from his lips. He could feel rain on his skin, curls sticking to the sides of his face, the weight of a gun in his hand.

A flicker of icy blue eyes just over Will’s shoulder told him everything he needed to know from the shuddering girl. Will could feel a lump form in his throat nearly making the words impossible to say while he slowly turned around.

“You were supposed... to leave.”

Hannibal stood tall, battered and bruised. There was blood covering his upper lip from his nose and the shoulder of his beautifully made pinstriped shirt was drenched in red. His silvering hair was messy and in his deep maroon eyes. A man who had been through a warzone and had come out the other side victorious, but still blood thirsty.

Hannibal was silent for a long while, eyes flickering over Will, talking all of the empath in, everything Will had to offer in his entirety. “We couldn’t leave without you,” Hannibal finally said after a deep breath.

His eyes weren’t so distracting now, but Will’s gaze dipped down to Hannibal’s lips for the briefest moment, the thought of begging Hannibal to leave with a kiss fluttering through his mind.

Hannibal’s large hand was warm as it was placed against Will’s cheek, thumb caressing over Will’s skin, tucking curls behind Will’s ear. The hand moved, snatching at the back of Will’s neck to hold him in place, seizing away the intimate moment as betrayal dug into his stomach. A hot stickiness poured onto the floor, Will’s tangled cry of pain filling the glass shattered kitchen, Abigail's gasp loud in his ears.

Will’s hand instinctively reached for something to hold onto, finding Hannibal's shoulder almost naturally, as if the man who was cutting him open could save him at the same time.

Needles began to poke into Will’s legs as his knees gave way, strong arms snatching him up to keep him in place. A hand petted at Will’s wet curls, almost apologetically, as if trying to assure Will that they never wanted to hurt him, Will had just made it so it was the only option available.

But it wasn’t the only option. They could have still left. They could have still run. Will would have gone with Hannibal willingly anywhere. As long as they were together, then anywhere would be fine. As long as the three of them were a family, then nothing else mattered.

“Time did reverse,” Hannibal said against Will’s ear as Will’s legs tried once more to drop his weight. Hannibal quickly adjusted, hugging Will even closer, his blood a hot and sticky mess between them. “The teacup that I shattered did come together.”

Will gasped and choked as air became a chore, each breath burning, the taste of copper coating his tongue.

“A place was made for Abigail in your world,” Hannibal continued, still caressing Will’s head so gently. He was always so gentle. Gentle would be the death of Will. This gentle monster had killed him. “Do you understand?”

Will shook his head, vision blurring, mind unable to do much more than listen to Hannibal’s rambling about teacups and worlds.

“Foggy and familiar.” Abigail’s voice trailed over to him.

“That place was made for all of us.” Hannibal released Will, pushing him back, hands firmly on the empath’s face. Will’s eyes met Hannibal’s, getting drug so far into the darkness he wasn’t sure he would be able to find his way out. Would Hannibal want Will to be found? “Together.”

Will’s blood was flowing freely now, dropping to the floor like heavy rain. Hannibal’s strong grip still supported him as he fought to stay conscious, limbs long since numb.

“I wanted to surprise you.”

Will nearly laughed, the sound not even choked out as he gasped once more for air, a ridiculous almost smile on his lips. What a surprise. It was comical, laughable. He would have loved it with everything in his body. Loved every passing moment of that surprise.

“And you...” Hannibal sighed, grip going slack on Will. “You wanted to surprise me.”

“We could have left together,” Abigail accused somewhere behind him on the couch. “After the sacrificial lamb. We could have left. I was ready, waiting upstairs. We were packed. There was a place for us.”

Will tumbled to the floor, unable to support himself, arm wrapping around where the knife had sliced through him. His hands shook, all feeling gone in them. He was shocked he could still find it in himself to use one of them to prop himself up against a wall.

Hannibal stepped closer, frame having always been taller than Will’s, but now ever towering. God like in his destruction, marked in the blood of his enemies. Because that’s what Will was now. It didn’t matter if he had planned to take it all back. It didn’t matter if he had come here to escape into the night with his friend. None of it mattered anymore. Hannibal had drawn a very clear line in the sand and there was absolutely no going back.

“I let you know me,” he said darkly, nearly spitting the words at Will. It was getting hard to hear now, Will’s head rushing with blood and adrenaline and panic and shoved underwater. Hannibal’s voice echoed in his ears. “See me. I gave you a rare gift, but you didn’t want it.”

“D-Didn’t I?” Will asked in a strangled tone, hoping, praying to a god he didn’t believe in, that Hannibal would understand the two words. Will wanted it. Had treasured it. He wouldn’t have warned Hannibal if he hadn’t appreciated being let in to see the wendigo in all of his shining dark glory.

“You would deny me my life.”

“No, no,” Will argued, shaking his head like a ragdoll. “Not your life.”

That seemed to upset the man above Will. “My freedom then! You would take that from me.” Will wanted to argue, but he couldn’t find any more words to say. “Confine me to a prison cell.” Hannibal looked away from him then and to Abigail who was still wide eyes and shuddering to the side. There was a long pause, a look between killer and captive before Hannibal’s attention fell back on Will. “Do you believe you could change me the way I’ve changed you?”

“I already did.”

Spots danced on the edges of Will’s vision, but he swore that he saw the fleeting expression of acceptance over Hannibal’s face. Hannibal had been changed and he now fully understood that he had. It had just taken Will to point it out for him to see, too stubborn to look before. Too scared to let someone into his life and be taken away like Mischa had, even if this was by his own hand.

Hannibal seemed to struggle for words for a moment, lips moving with nothing coming out of them until he could finally speak. “Fate and circumstance have brought us back to this moment... when the teacup shatters... I forgive you, Will.”

The only sound for a long while were Will’s gasps and moaning breaths into the kitchen, the words on a loop in Will’s ears as a ringing began to settle in.

“Will you forgive me?”

Will blinked several times, trying to force the spot from his vision. Forgive him for what? Hurting Jack? If Jack lived, yes. Shoving Alana out of a window? If Alana lived, yes. Hiding Abigail from him? She was alive, the answer was clearly a yes. Stabbing him? He could forgive the pain. He could forgive the hurt. He could forgive Hannibal of anything. He could justify it in some way, a way that he could live with. It would be easy for Will. And then it came to him like a light turning on in a dark room, scattering the darkness and illuminating everything.

“No,” Will gasped out, his head shaking again. “Don’t.”

Don’t take her.

“Don’t.”

Please, Hannibal. Anything but her.

“N-No. No. No.”

You just gave her back.

Hannibal’s hand outstretched to Abigail, palm up, unthreatening. Will wanted to beg her to run, but he couldn’t form any other words. They just spewed from him like a broken record. Forever on repeat.

“No, no, no, no, no.”

“Why didn’t you save me, dad?”

Don’t take her again!

“Abigail,” Hannibal said firmly. “Come to me.”

Will watched helplessly as Abigail stepped forward, placing a far too trusting hand into Hannibal’s. He guided her around, as gracefully as a pirouette being performed by a dancer. Strong arms circled around Abigail, the same curved knife that had been used on Will now at Abigail’s neck.

“I was always meant to die with my throat slashed in a kitchen, wasn’t I?” her voice asked from the couch as she watched the scene unravel in Will’s mind like a ball of yarn.

The words ripped from Will’s throat, a cry as tears burned at his eyes. “No, no, no, no!” A stupid record on repeat, limbs too weak to move, body too heavy to do anything to help.

The slice was swift, leaving Abigail gasping, hands shaking as they went to the new cut that was gushing blood. Will sobbed as Hannibal released Abigail like a piece of discarded paper and her body collapsed to his kitchen floor, still gasping like a fish, body convulsing.

He tried to move to her, fell to the side. Hannibal leaned down, catching Will’s gaze, pulling him from Abigail for merely a moment. “You can make it all go away,” he said softly, a single tear rolling down over his nose only to mix with the blood gathered up on the floor.

Save her!

“Put your head back.”

Damn it Hannibal!

“Close your eyes.”

Save her, you monster!

“Wade into the quiet of the stream.”

Save her!

And Hannibal was gone, smoke blown away into the night, a ghost, a phantom lost to the thunderstorm outside. And Will collapsed to the floor, a single hand dragging himself to Abigail’s squirming form, the other still trying to keep his insides his insides and not his outsides. A trembling hand reached out, clasping over Abigail’s neck, her blood sickeningly hot against his fingers.

“You did try.”

Will gasped, breath obtainable now. Vision back to a clearness that was nearly blinding. Pain nothing more than a memory on his skin. He was on his couch in Virginia. It was mid-morning, on January 30th. His name was Will Graham and he remembered her. All of it was back up until that night.

The cases, the killings, the copycat, the Ripper. He remembered the barred cells and the hatred that poisoned his veins as Hannibal went free and he did not. He remembered sending a killer after Hannibal and Hannibal finally claiming his kills and letting Will go free.

He remembered the anger pointed to the man until the time spent together lessened the hurt, letting Will feel more of the emotions he had pushed down. After all, Hannibal had explained it very well, his emotions were his and he was allowed to feel them in whatever capacity that they needed to be felt, as long as he let them move along when the time came. He couldn’t dwell on them.

And soon that anger faded into something much deeper. Something much more alive than rage had ever made Will feel. Something that kept Will’s heart beating as the days grew darker. Something that kept his mind open and his conscience clear.

“I don’t hate him,” Abigail said softly next to Will, causing the man to jump, scared by his own imagination. How often that happened. How often he made his own heart race with his own thoughts. Thoughts that weren’t tasty, but almost could be when he was with Hannibal.

“You still want to go with him?” Will asked breathlessly, his voice hoarse from being taken away from him for so long.

Abigail inhaled deeply, leaving the couch, knees still covered in mud. “Yes,” she stated strongly with a firm nod.

“He gave you back to me.” Will sighed. “And then he took you away.” He blinked several times as he thought. “It’s Lucy and the football. He just keeps pulling you away.” He gave a small, broken laugh. “What if no one died? What if...” Will trailed off, trying to make his thoughts coherent through the headache that was beginning to set in. Would remembering always be this painful?

“What if we all left together? Like we were supposed to. After he served the lamb. Where would we have gone.”

“In some other world?” Abigail asked thoughtfully.

Will gave a small nod and watched as she began another lap around the table as if she were standing on a tightrope. “In some other world.”

Abigail gave a shrug and a thin smile. “He said he made a place for us.”

Will’s throat felt tight as tears threatened to fall at the thought of everything that could have been. “A place was made for you, Abigail, in this world. It was the only place I could make for you.”

He could see a tear run down the girl’s pale cheek and her chin wobbled as if she were holding back a sob. Her dress continued to drip water onto the floor, her feet leaving muddy footprints behind her.

“Why are you covered in dirt?” Will asked after a moment.

“In another world,” she answered with a smile. “In a world where we left after dinner.”

“We could disappear now,” Hannibal’s voice echoed. “Tonight.” Will could only stare at Hannibal across his dining table, unsure how to respond, knowing what was right and what he craved. “Feed your dogs, leave a note for Alana and never see her or Jack again.” There was a small silence as if Hannibal were hoping Will would respond, but when Will still couldn’t find the words, Hannibal continued on with a small smile. “Almost polite.”

Will quelled the feeling clawing up from his chest as soon as it appeared, killing it before it had a chance to live. “Then this would be our last supper.” Hypothetical. All of this had to be kept hypothetical. He couldn’t let his wants run away with him. He knew what was right and what he craved. Will gave a breath with a fleeting smile that made Hannibal look away from him, enough of an answer.

“Of this life.” It was another hopeful push, one that Will let himself practically latch onto, begging for Hannibal to try once more, because if asked again, Will would say yes. Will would go to the ends of the earth. The rule of three would decide his fate. “I’ve served lamb.”

“Sacrificial,” Will agreed. Please, Hannibal, just ask me again.

“I don’t need a sacrifice, do you?”

Will knew what he should say. He knew exactly what he needed to do. He needed to ignore the plea, he needed to turn this conversation back on Jack. Break that spell. He needed to do all sorts of things. He had always needed to do all sorts of things.

Would Hannibal forgive him for everything Will was going to do to him? Would Hannibal offer any sort of pardon on Will’s eventual sins? Would anything be the same? The same as in this moment? Never. It would never be the same.

“No,” Will whispered, changing fate, picking paths. This was a crossroads he had been trapped at for a long time. A path leading towards a jail cell if he confessed. A path leading to being the FBI’s

bitch for the rest of his years, Hannibal locked away. And a path that was nothing but outer darkness with a wendigo's hand outstretched and a promise to guide Will through the darkness no matter what arose. "I'll feed my dogs, leave a note for Alana and never see her or Jack again. It'll be almost polite."

"We live in a beautiful place," Abigail continued. "It reminds me of Scotland. The Scotland you see in movies. I've never been to Scotland." She gave a sad sort of smile to Will. "You'll have to take me with you when you and Hannibal see the world."

Will snorted out laughter, the sound tight in his throat. They would never be allowed to see the world. If anything they would only see their own graves.

"We have a large garden that I spend days in, picking flowers for Hannibal's table arrangements," Abigail continued, hands now caked in dirt too. "And a lake. Oh, I love the lake." Abigail gave a small spin, water from her dress splashing at Will. He covered his smile with his hand, hiding it away from the world. The world would lock him away again if they could see inside of his mind. "You take me fishing and in the summer we have picnics. Hannibal likes to read under a large tree and you sometimes skip rocks with me when you aren't tangled up in him."

"A family?" Will asked softly.

"A family," Abigail agreed with a nod.

A knock on the door shattered the dream, Abigail's body splashing away in a puddle of water that had never existed. Will frowned, a coldness taking over his body as he rose from the couch to fetch the door.

He pulled it open and when he saw who it was, could only stare. Hannibal stood on the front deck, three piece ridiculous suit, long grey coat that screamed expensive. Hair was pushed back, neat and tidy, gloves removed and held in hands that had grown red with the cold. On one wrist was a gift bag of some sort and there were no crutches in sight.

Will blinked several times and glanced behind Hannibal to see Alana's car and he wondered how Hannibal had come to acquire it. Had he stolen it? Would he risk that?

No. Hannibal was arrogant and cocky and had the ego the size of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, but he wasn't stupid. Alana had let him borrow the car. For whatever reason Hannibal had convinced her of, Will could only guess, but he was here. In front of Will. With a present.

"May I come in?" Hannibal asked, breaking up Will's thoughts.

Numbly, Will stepped out of the way and allowed Hannibal into his home. Hannibal politely knocked the snow from his shoes on the mat and pulled off his coat, hanging it up on a hook by the door.

Of all of the days for Will to be served. Of all of the days he had to see Abigail. Of all of the days that he had to remember such horrible things. Of all of the days that Hannibal had to stop by.

"You're not using your crutches," Will pointed out dully, closing the door behind him, an odd feeling bubbling up in his stomach and making him nauseous.

“It seems that I am a free man once more,” Hannibal said lightly, finding humor in his compartment of crutches to a prison cell. But both of them knew what hell that was and it was something neither of them wanted to ever return to. “There’s something that I need to talk to you about, but we can discuss that later. At the moment-”

“I have something I need to say to you first before it becomes something I am shouting,” Will interrupted, turning to face Hannibal who had a rather calm look on his face, hands folded in front of himself, patiently waiting for whatever Will had to tell him. “I remembered something and I-I need you to...” Will trailed off with a sigh, hand rubbing at his chin as an anxious energy flowed through him. “I need... I-I need...”

“What is it you need, Will?” Hannibal asked curiously, moving into the living room and setting the gift bag onto the coffee table beside The Divine Comedy which Will still hadn’t put away, having found comfort in its pages at night when he was alone. Will followed after him, at a loss for words, watching as he moved some of the pages of the legal document atop of the coffee table. “Divorce forms?”

“Stop going through my things,” Will grumbled, waving his hand so Hannibal would step back from the paperwork that was embarrassing to even try to think about. “Stop talking. I’m trying to think.”

“Forgive me.” Hannibal straightened back up.

“And stop being so fucking polite. It’s aggravating,” Will hissed through clenched teeth, a hand to his head, grabbing and pulling at his curls.

“What did you remember, Will? Shall we start with that?”

Will inhaled deeply through his nose and pointed at Hannibal, upset at himself for being on the verge of tears. His words came out thick and low. “You took her from me.” Hannibal raised an eyebrow, but waited quietly for a further explanation. “I knew you had, but you-you-you...” Will growled, throwing his hands down in frustration.

“I assume you are referring to Abigail.”

His voice was so calm it made Will’s hands clench.

“Yes,” Will answered through clenched teeth.

“I will not give you a weak excuse. I seem to recall you telling me that you prefer sins of omission to outright lies.” His voice was steady and Will had never wanted to attack someone or something as badly as he did Hannibal Lecter. The man never failed to be the pebble in Will’s shoe and Will had had just about enough of it. “I did it for selfish reasons mostly. A petty act to heal a broken heart. You forgave me once. Can you forgive me again?”

That was enough to make Will snap. Will pulled back his fist and threw it, his knuckles colliding satisfyingly with Hannibal’s sharp cheekbone. Will winced and shook out his hand as Hannibal stumbled backward, surprisingly not going down, though Will could see the trembling in his legs.

Hannibal straightened himself upright, sniffing and eyes watering. He kept his composure though, much to Will’s dislike and to Hannibal’s credit. It only pissed Will off more, pulling his fist back once more and whether Hannibal saw it coming and let it happen or not was anyone’s guess.

Hannibal fell onto the floor between the coffee table and the couch and Will quickly dropped to his knees, sitting on Hannibal’s chest, consciously avoiding where Hannibal had been operated on, the reason unknown to even Will. His knees pinned down Hannibal’s arms and he went to work, fist hitting Hannibal over and over again until his arm went sore and his knuckles were bloody.

Until Hannibal was coughing blood, teeth red in a smile, nose pouring like a fountain, cheeks cut up with crimson. Will tumbled off of Hannibal who used an elbow to prop himself up, ruby red spit running down his chin and staining his white dress shirt, though he didn’t look too upset about it.

Will unclenched his fists and winced at the ache in them, holding them to his chest. Hannibal didn’t say a word, just chuckled slightly, eyes alight like that was most fun he had had in years.

Will licked at his lips and exhaled deeply, pointing to the bag that was on the coffee table, trying to catch his breath despite the fact that his heart beat was steady and even. “What’s that.”

Hannibal used the back of his hand to wipe at his nose with a still bloody smile.

“Happy birthday, Will.”

Wer den Teufel hält, der soll ihn gut halten, er wird kaum ein zweites Mal erwischt- Whoever holds the devil should hold him well, he is hardly caught a second time.

Der Teufel, er ist alt, werden Sie selbst alt, und er wird Sinn machen!- Hell, he's old, get old yourself and it will make sense!

Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

> “I’ve found myself longing for his company, missing our conversations that are always too short, wishing he paid me the same amount of attention he gives the simple mention of your name. If that is love, then...”

Chapter Notes

> Ooooooooooo! Ok Peeps. I have been super excited about this chapter for a long time and I finally posted in my other story and I promised a chapter in this one when I posted to that one. This one is long AF and things go down and woooot. I'm so excited.
>
> Also I quote a ton of The Raven by Edgar Allan Poe. I love that poem and I just kinda thought it fit for what Hannibal was going through. Ok! Please let me know what you guys think. I hope you enjoy it and I believe I will be going back to my normal once a week updates now. Fingers crossed. I still have a lot to do with working now. Ok. I'll stop rambling and let you read.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Losing You Terrifies Me

Will winced, air hissing as it was pulled through his teeth. The water was warm against his skin and Hannibal was awfully gentle as he cleaned Will’s knuckles with a bit of paper towel, but that didn’t stop the burning.

Hannibal’s eyes flickered up from their work, but he stayed silent. He had been silent the entire time he had been patching them both up. Will hadn’t found it in himself to say a word either, though he didn’t feel guilty for taking his anger out on the killer’s face. In fact, it added a little bit of color to the man’s cheeks.

Will snorted at the thought and Hannibal straightened up a little bit, stopping his work on Will’s hands. “What are you finding so funny?” he asked, breaking the silence around them.

“You look good in red.”

There was a huff of laughter from Hannibal who went back to work cleaning Will’s wounds. Silence fell back over them, something far more calm now than earlier. Hannibal finished cleaning

Will's knuckles and wrapped them up before cleaning up the small kitchen that was littered with bloodied paper towels and bandages.

Hannibal found a rag and wet it in the sink, dabbing at the red stain in his shirt, the task futile. After a moment, Hannibal gave up and cleaned out the rag before turning around. "Is this you forgiving me?"

Will tapped his fingers on the countertop, ignoring the scream of pain in his abused fingers. He chewed on the words for a moment before answering. "Mutually unspoken pact to ignore the worst in one another in order to continue enjoying the best," Will replied, the words picked carefully.

Hannibal seemed to consider them in silence for a moment and gave a small nod. "I believe that is more than a fair observation of our relationship."

Will glanced around the room sensing the need to change the subject, his anger more than satisfied for the moment. "A great way to spend my birthday, isn't it?" Will scoffed at how the day had turned out, not that he had expected anything more. "I got divorce papers this morning, I have a fight and remember Abigail dying and then I beat up my boyfriend."

Hannibal tilted his head curiously at the list of things that had gone wrong during the day, seeming to try to figure out which one to focus on first. "A fight with Abigail?" he finally settled on.

"I see her and Beverly from time to time. Abby helps me with emotions that I have to work out and Beverly focuses my mind while I'm working cases," Will muttered, dismissing the reply with a wave of his hand. "I know they aren't real. They just help me think. I'm not crazy."

"Far from," Hannibal agreed, moving over to Will and leaning against the counter opposite from the empath. "I sometimes have conversations with my sister when I need help working through a problem."

"Mischa?" Will asked curiously. Hannibal nodded. "Since when does the great Dr. Lecter have problems?"

"They became quite commonplace around you, Will. I've given up everything I have for you and you have ruined me over and over again. Your presence changed the very course of my life forever and I was more than ready to easily accept such changes."

"An-and," -Will swallowed the lump in his throat at the admission- "how do you see her?"

"It depends on the problem and the point of view I need. Sometimes she's as I remember her and others she's how I imagine her if she had lived," Hannibal explained simply. "There's nothing wrong with trying to work through your problems with a different point of view."

"Thank you."

"For?" Hannibal asked pushing himself from the counter and stepping around it to be directly in front of Will.

"For not thinking that I'm crazy," Will replied, nervously looking away from Hannibal's ever intensely dead eyes.

“I’ve never thought you crazy, Will. I’ve only ever held you in the highest regards.” Will cleared his throat, taking a step back as Hannibal took another forward. Hannibal, reading Will's expression, didn’t move further forward but he didn’t step back either. “Am I your boyfriend Will?”

Will felt a heat come to his cheeks and he quickly turned away from Hannibal, heading into the living room and snatching up the gift bag that was still untouched on the table. It was rather heavy for how small it was.

“What is it?”

“Stop deflecting Will,” Hannibal ordered as he followed after Will with steady strides. “You’re better than that and have deflected better before as well.”

“I said boyfriend, didn’t I?” Will asked back, voice weak and eyes avoiding Hannibal’s at all costs. “I must have meant it if I said it.”

Will could feel Hannibal’s amused smirk, but he didn’t look up to see if it was present or just a feeling in the room. “Is this a bad time to point out that your boyfriend let you beat him up?”

Will gave a sharp laugh and nodded. “I am more than well aware that you let me take everything out on you. And I thank you for that and I am slightly sorry that I took it out on your face, but you deserved it.”

“I know.”

“And there is something about you dripping blood that-” Will bit his lip tightly to silence himself and the rest of the thought, eyes finally looking up to Hannibal whose eyebrows were raised curiously, waiting for the rest of the sentence that Will did his best to swallow.

“Me dripping blood?” Hannibal pushed, hand reaching out to caress Will’s cheek, brushing horridly long curls behind his ear. “*Pasakyk man, mano meile.*”

“You belong drenched in red,” Will answered in a whisper, doing his best to push the memory of a knife cutting him open from his mind as Hannibal’s hand slid to the back of his neck and held him in place with a familiar feeling. “Dripping crimson, drinking cherry wine, breathing ruby, living in scarlet.”

Hannibal pulled him close, but there wasn’t any pain, just a kiss. Not heavy, not needy, not hungry. Just there. Just being. Just existing in this tiny space that was strictly theirs and absolutely no one else's.

“Open it,” Hannibal insisted, releasing Will and taking a seat on the couch. Will took a moment to regain his functions and slowly lowered himself beside Hannibal, pulling tissue paper from the paper bag.

“You know my birthday,” Will muttered. “But I don’t know when yours is.”

“January 20th.”

Will’s hands paused. “Oh,” he said softly. “I didn’t realize-”

“All is forgiven,” Hannibal assured, hand taking Will’s knee with a kind squeeze. “You didn’t know, nor do I enjoy the fuss.”

“Next year,” Will stated strongly and Hannibal nearly took it as a threat of a massive party looming in the distance.

“Next year,” he agreed softly, hesitantly.

Will nodded in approval and dug into the bag, pulling out a brightly colored blue ball that squeaked when he gave it a squeeze. “Am I your pet, Dr. Lecter?” Will glanced up with a smile. “Do you have a collar you would like me to wear too?”

“I thought that Izzy would be here. That was for her,” Hannibal explained. “Though I could always buy you a collar if you feel the need to show the world you’re owned by me.” Hannibal’s fingers trailed over Will’s neck and Will shivered, squirming from Hannibal's touches.

With a small shake of his head, more in amusement than dismissal of the idea, Will reached into the box once more, surprised to find an iphone at the bottom. He pulled it out, flipped it over in his hand before looking up at Hannibal at a complete loss for words.

“I read several books for you. Alana only had a small collection, so I did the best with what I had,” Hannibal explained. “Decameron by Giovanni Boccaccio, The Count of Monte Cristo, All Quiet on the Western Front, The Scarlet Pimpernel. All in their original languages. There’s several more on there as well.”

Will could only stare at the man, the phone feeling severely heavy in his hand, because he knew what this meant. He knew the underlying feeling that a gift like this would bring. It hurt Will in a way that he couldn’t recall ever being hurt before. It sliced deeper than that cut Hannibal gave him ever could.

“Hannibal,” Will whispered softly. It was all starting to collect, gather itself together in a clear picture. One that Will didn’t want to think about. No crutches, meaningful gifts, feather light kisses. He was saying goodbye. “You’re leaving.” Will watched as Hannibal readjusted himself on the couch, legs crossed and hands folded in his lap, eyes on Will, the silence more answer than what Will wanted. “When?”

“Tonight.”

Will could feel his throat close up as a sudden punch in the gut shot his stomach up into his chest. He couldn’t breathe, couldn’t see through the tears that were starting to blur his vision, couldn’t think beyond that one stupid repeating word of *no.*

“That was what I wanted to speak to you about, Will. And I will respect any answer you give me and any time that you need to process the question for an answer. I can always come back.” Hannibal inhaled deeply, stretching his fingers before lacing them back together as if he were giving a difficult diagnosis to a patient and had to pretend to feel bad. “Come with me.”

Happy fucking birthday to me, huh, he thought.

“What?” Will asked, the word barely croaking from his throat.

“Come with me, Will. I have the necessary papers for both of us, all money we could need. It could be the two of us against the world,” Hannibal stated firmly, strongly.

Beg me Hannibal.

“One word on the subject will silence me forever, Will.”

Sound like you want me to be with you! Not like I’m a burden for you to drag along.

“I just wanted the option to be there for you.”

Will shook his head, eyes pleading with Hannibal for something better than this weak attempt at a farewell. Will inhaled deeply, holding back a sob as one more piece of his world splintered off and fell into the void. This wasn’t fair. God, this was so unfair. How cruel could God be? Why couldn’t he just let Will be content with what he had right now? It had been so nice, the late nights with Hannibal. Stolen kisses and shared stories all locked away in the moonlight, for no one but themselves. His sanctuary in the storm.

“You’ve asked me this before,” Will said after a moment, mouth sticky around the words. “With a bit more conviction.”

“I’m far too afraid of the same outcome to push you harder,” Hannibal answered solidly, not making an attempt to even so much as hint to the pulling want of Will to be forever in his life. He could let Will go. He would let Will go. He would never darken Will’s mind again if it meant that Will was safe and happy. Anything to make Will happy and keep him protected.

“That’s it?” Will asked, the pain only digging deeper into his ribs.

“You were always going to say no, Will. I’m just trying to make this easier.”

“On who, you?” Will demanded.

“Both of us.”

It was said so plainly, so matter-of-factly that Will found himself at a loss for words. He set the iphone onto the coffee table and got to his feet, beginning to pace with his hands tangled in his curls.

“I can’t leave, Hannibal,” Will choked out, trying to calm the raging storm in his lungs that was making it more difficult to breathe. “I can’t just walk out on Walter and on this case. I can’t just go.”

“Alright.”

“But I want to.” Will’s hands clutched at the front of his shirt now as if it were burning his body and he wanted to rip it off. “God, I want to.” Hannibal stayed quiet, eyes following Will as he made dents in the floors with his feet. “I would love nothing more than to run away with you. Make me make the wrong choice here, Hannibal.” Will stopped and turned to the man who was sitting still on the couch, eyes cold and clinical, blocking Will out. Will moved over to him, forcing Hannibal to put both feet on the floor as Will straddled his lap, hands digging painfully into his silver locks. “Hannibal,” he said softly, licking at his lips. Hannibal’s hands rested on Will’s hips naturally, thumbs rubbing into the fabric of his shirt. “Force me to go with you. Trick me into saying yes.” Will’s voice was begging, desperate. “Use me. Manipulate me. Hide me away, kidnap me and hold me as your hostage until the end of days. Anything, please!”

Will’s head lowered onto Hannibal’s shoulder and he sunk into Hannibal, unable to hold up his weight anymore, and there was no fight from the older man. No argument. No yelling. Nothing. Hannibal simply let Will be. This was Will’s choice. Once more it was up to Will and Will’s wants terrified him.

He would go, just like he would have over dinner if his moral compass didn’t decide to kick in at the last minute, just like what it was doing now. He would be happy the rest of his life with his monster, he just needed the monster to drag him along. He wasn’t strong enough to fight this battle for himself, lessons taught to him as a child chaining him to where he was now. The ideals of being a better father for Walter than his own father had been for him fastened him to the floor, caged him in this house. He was tied to his responsibility and he always would be. If only Hannibal would untie him.

“Please,” Will whispered weakly. “Fight for me Hannibal. One more time. Save me from myself.”

“Come with me.”

The words were soft and sweet and held a hint more warmth to them than earlier, but they weren’t enough to pull Will from his collapsing life. He was sinking fast, his ship on fire and there was no life preserver on board. It had floated too far away to be of any real use. And Will had to play the dutiful captain and go down with his ship. He always went down with his ship.

“Make me dinner?” Will asked, the sudden change in subject an answer for Hannibal. Will’s indirect no. Will’s choice. And Hannibal would forever respect that choice. “And dessert?”

“*Viskas, ką jums reikia padaryti, tai klausti, mano mylimasis.*”

Alana’s eyes were blurred with tears, as her fingers tapped over the note on the desk having read it over and over until the words blurred and became as numb feeling as she did. Margot’s hand was on her shoulder and Alana could sense the fear in her wife’s grip, but Margot didn’t show her emotions on her sleeve like Alana did.

As the reality of what happened began to sink in, Alana had gotten hysterical, unable to stop sobbing. Margot was sick to her stomach, as if she were going to faint.

Alana knew better than anything. She had 48 hours and they were wasting time, but her hands were tied. She couldn’t do a thing to help her son without bringing police down on the place and Hannibal was gone. He had already left and there was nothing that Alana could do.

She could hear the study door open and footsteps that she recognized, tired from having been on their feet all day. “Your car is back in your port,” the accented voice announced as the footsteps came closer. “I will be on my way now. Thank you for your help Alana, Margot. I...”

Alana glanced to her left as the voice trailed off and could see Hannibal, with a bloodied shirt and cut up face, looking over them curiously, leaning against the desk with his hip. He was silent, asking for an answer to why there was an emotional dampness to the room.

Alana took a shaky breath and scooped up the note, holding it out to Hannibal. “He took Morgan,” Alana announced, voice cracking as she held the tears back. The paper was pulled from her hands, her hand simply dropping back to her lap as if it were too heavy for her to lift. “The ransom has been set.”

“It’s you,” Margot said, her voice more airy and quieter than normal. “He wants you, Hannibal.”

Hannibal’s eyes dropped to the note and he read over the scribbles there in a handwriting that he knew more than he liked to admit.

I have Morgan. Hannibal Lecter must be delivered to me, unarmed, by this Saturday night at 8 o’clock or I will kill the boy. I know that you will not contact the authorities, but to be assured, we are watching your house and if there is any attempt at reaching out to outside help, I will kill the boy. Any attempt to double cross me and I will kill the boy. Please send Hannibal by way of Hall Mansion and I will return the boy.

Hannibal lowered the note to the desk with a deep breath, plans being pushed away in light of a new one that he didn’t necessarily want to dive into.

“What is it you want from me, Alana?” Hannibal asked into the stiff air.

“I don’t expect you to stay,” Alana answered with a hand going to her mouth as her composure broke down once more.

“Find my son, Dr. Lecter,” Margot answered darkly, a bitterness in her tone.

Hannibal gave a small nod. “Then let’s call this as us even.” He rapped his knuckles on the desk two or three times before straightening up and pulling his coat back on. “One of you needs to come with me to collect the boy. I will not be returning with you.” He turned away from the desk, heading for the door, leaving both Margot and Alana in a silent shock at how easily the man had agreed.

Alana got to her feet and turned to face Hannibal, who was patiently waiting for her, holding the study door open. Margot shook her head and moved past Alana and to Hannibal, leaving Alana to collapse weakly back into her chair.

“He means more to me than money does, Dr. Lecter,” she clarified. “I know what you think of me.” His eyebrows rose and Margot frowned. “Let’s go get my son.”

The drive was long and quiet, Hannibal at the wheel, not wanting to draw more attention or people to this exchange by allowing a driver to take them. Hannibal turned off of I-81 near Route 114 and stopped at a large gate blocking a dirt road to the property.

“It says that there’s cameras,” Margot stated. “There’s no trespassing signs.”

“If the cameras were working the police would be here by now,” Hannibal pointed out as he climbed from the car. He made his way to the gate and pulled at the chain that had been cut. He tossed it to the ground and pushed open the metal gate before returning to the car and driving through and further up the dark dirt road. “You seem relatively calm for your son being missing.”

“He’s not missing. We know where he is,” Margot corrected. “And now I have you as the bargaining chip. I’m not calm, I’m scared that something will go wrong. This is my child.”

“And if the boy is dead?”

The blunt question made Margot’s face pale. “I would die, not from being destitute, but from a broken heart.”

“And leave Alana alone?”

“You know what she would do if she lost all of this as well as I do. She’s not a coward when it comes to ending her own life.”

Hannibal hummed thoughtfully, wondering if Alana had really changed that much. It had been a long time since he had been around the woman and maybe the change was his fault. It was very likely to be his fault, but it bothered him that she would rob him of taking her life that was promised between them. But she could pick her own fate. It wasn’t up to him, but he wanted it to be.

High above the trees, a tower loomed over, made of concrete and steel rebar. The road curved and eventually came upon the abandoned tower. There were fire damaged buildings overgrown by plants beside the tower and a large pond off to the side.

“What is this place?” Margot questioned as Hannibal silenced the car and turned off the headlights.

“It was supposed to be a mansion, but the man building it went bankrupt. They say that he set a fire to it to obtain insurance money, purposely killing his family in the fire. They’re ghosts are supposed to haunt here,” Hannibal answered, passing the keys to Margot so that she could make the drive back.

“And the tower?”

“A sixteen story elevator shaft. Someone fell down it back in the 90’s. They say that a ghost pushed him down the ten stories that he had climbed.” Hannibal took a deep breath as he looked out at the now dark property that was only outlined with the moonlight.

“How do you know this?” Margot questioned, following as Hannibal climbed from the car, the doors closing echoing in the night. Hannibal led her through the snowy field and towards the building beside the tower, their footsteps crunching through the snow.

“I enjoy quiet places,” Hannibal responded. “Do you expect that I just sit in my home eating people all day long? I have hobbies and other things I enjoy doing as well.”

“You’ve been here before,” Margot pointed out. “You go to abandoned places?”

“They tell stories if you’re quiet enough,” Hannibal explained, voice softer now that they had reached the edge of the building. Hannibal glanced around it, tilting his head back to look at the roof and then carefully at the tower. “There’s a gun fifth floor up,” he whispered, looking back towards the burnt building before them. “Don’t do anything rash Margot. Take the boy and get out. Don’t look back.”

Hannibal gave a deep sigh, looking up at the moon and Margot could sense the squirming eagerness of a caged animal. Someone about to give up their freedom because it was the right thing to do, not because they wanted to.

He could have left. Hannibal had every chance to run. He didn’t need to return Alana’s car. But he came back. He was helping Margot now, helping Morgan just because deep down, Doctor Hannibal Lecter was really a kind person who had been turned on by the world, dealt a cruel hand, though what he had done with it did not excuse him, Margot understood why Hannibal was the way he was.

Hannibal pushed up to the line of the house that had bricks fallen from it as well as construction material scattered everywhere. There were dirty mattresses and drug paraphernalia, used condoms and smashed beer bottles.

They stepped through an open doorway where paint was chipping away and were met with a large brick fireplace with a white pentagram spray painted across the bricks.

“Stop,” a strong male voice ordered from somewhere in the shadows. Both Hannibal and Margot froze, the air thick. “Search them.”

Margot jumped with a small squeak as hands grabbed her arms. Hannibal didn’t seem to notice really. He stayed silent and calm as his privacy was invaded and hands patted him down, taking liberties over certain parts of him. Margot watched him with wide eyes as she was handled carelessly as well. Once the roaming hands were finished with their feel ups, Margot was shoved forward roughly and she stumbled slightly as she was led closer to the fireplace.

Once at the brick, both were turned around and Margot felt her mouth go dry as a gasp left her lips and her hand went over her mouth. She tried to step forward, but Hannibal’s strong hand on her shoulder kept her in place.

Hannibal wore a frown as he took in the scene before him. In the scraps of moonlight he could make out Morgan’s wet body in the dirt. There was a puddle of water pooled around his pale body, his lips blue from the cold of the winter night.

“Dr. Lecter,” a new voice said from behind Morgan. Hannibal saw the gun first, the person second. But he knew who it was. Knew from the beginning who it was. Liam stood tall and proud, smug about it all. “Would you like to share your diagnosis with the class?”

“Stay here,” Hannibal ordered softly to Margot. “He’s alright.” Margot stood frozen and numb, hands still over her mouth, eyes wide, knowing deep down it was a white lie, but clung to it.

Hannibal stepped forward and moved to Morgan, kneeling down beside the young boy’s body, ignoring the water that now soaked the knees of his suit. He leaned down, the boy’s nose by his ear as he watched the boy’s chest carefully. He could feel a faint breath against his cheek and there was a slight, but noticeable rise and fall of his chest.

Hannibal placed his fingers to Morgan’s neck, taking his pulse, counting it out carefully. Slow and mostly imperceptible. Hannibal lowered his head to Morgan’s chest, listening carefully to his breathing, hair going wet from the boy's dripping shirt. There were fine, short, high-pitched, intermittently crackling sounds with each exhale.

Hannibal checked over the boy once more and not finding any further injury, lifted the boy up, pulling at his freezing wet clothes. He tossed the items aside, stripping the boy down from his well pressed sweater vest, dress shirt and slacks until he was only in his pale skin.

Hannibal removed his coat and wrapped the boy up in it, holding Morgan closer to his body in hope of sharing some of his heat.

"Margot," Hannibal called, rising to his feet. "He's still alive, but he needs medical attention."

"I didn't say you could leave," Liam stated firmly, waving his gun around boredly. "And you still haven't shared with the class, Dr. Lecter. I'm curious what you've learned."

"Near-drowning," Hannibal replied, able to see them shoving and holding the boy underwater in that pond while Morgan struggled. "Crackles, water in his lungs. Possible hypothermia due to being in cold wet clothes for too long."

"Very good, Dr. Lecter. It seems you haven't lost your touch." Liam gave him a sweet smile. "Now, tell Margot what she has to do to save her son."

Margot stared at Hannibal's blank face, but could see the fire burning in his eyes, his anger held at bay simply so that Morgan had a chance and she had never been more grateful to the man. Not in therapy, not in the freedom from her brother, just now.

"There is an ER six miles from here, UPMC Pinnacle West Shore Campus on 1995 Technology Parkway," Hannibal stated firmly, voice far too calm for what was happening, cold as ice. If Margot had been more sound of mind, she might have wondered how Hannibal held onto all of his information, how he stored away every answer to every single question in the universe, but instead she was more focused on trying to remember everything that Hannibal was saying. "He needs to be put on oxygen immediately and warmed slowly. Keep the heater on in the car, but do not rub at his skin to keep him warm. If you have any other blankets, wrap him in them. He might develop pneumonia and may possibly have brain damage."

There was a cry from Margot's throat, hands trembling against her lips, knees shaking under her. He was being honest. That's all she could ask. He wasn't sugar coating it or trying to soften the blow. He was telling her exactly what to expect. Exactly what she was dealing with.

He stepped over to her, Morgan clutched tightly, protectively against his chest. He reached her and she pulled the boy into her arms, hugging him, clenched tight to her body.

"Go," Hannibal ordered. "1995 Technology Parkway. Do you understand?" Margot gave a nod, tears in her eyes. "You need to stay focused, Margot. He needs you."

Margot gave another nod and a thankful, tear filled smile before moving away from Hannibal and back out into the snowy night.

Hannibal released a deep breath in his chest, trying to quell the fire burning in his own lungs. He turned back to where Liam stood with a self-satisfied smile, gun still out and aimed at Hannibal.

"Not as bad as your brother?" Hannibal questioned folding his hands in front of him.

Liam gave a shrug, that smile still plastered over his lips. “I didn’t say that I was good,” he defended with a laugh on the tip of his tongue. “I thought you would approve of my cruelty, Dr. Lecter. Someone who can be as cruel and calm as you.”

“The boy did not deserve that,” Hannibal replied, arms aching as a heat pulsed through him, his inner monster trying to claw its way up and out of him. He held it off, pushed it down. This wasn’t the right time. He had to play this game of chess carefully if he wanted to preserve himself. He had to be careful. He was still healing, still not fully whole.

“I doubt he will remember when he wakes up,” Liam said. “If he can remember anything. Brain damage is very common in near-drowning.” Liam watched as Hannibal’s jaw tightened, but the man stayed quiet. Liam stepped forward and stopped in front of Hannibal. “You’ve gone soft. I’ve heard terrible stories about you. I’ve heard great stories about you and a little boy is what brings you to me?”

“I was in debt,” Hannibal reminded. “I was simply repaying it.”

“I would tell you not to lie to me,” Liam muttered, scratching at his head with the barrel of his gun before pointing it back at Hannibal. “But I know that you like to speak in half-truths, which are just as impolite as lies, but I suppose I can’t be mad at you for them. They are still truths.”

“What is it that you want with me exactly?” Hannibal shifted the weight on his legs to lessen the pressure on his weaker one. It didn’t go unnoticed from Liam who lowered the gun down to the knee. Hannibal didn’t move, didn’t flinch but internally was begging that the trigger wasn’t pulled.

“You mean you haven’t figured it out yet?” Liam asked, head tipped to the side, eyes returning from the doctor’s knee back to Hannibal’s cool face. “I thought I had been rather obvious.”

“I’m afraid I am still in the dark.”

That wasn’t true. Liam knew that wasn’t true. It pissed him off that Hannibal wasn’t playing along. Oh, he was playing, just not into Liam’s game. Liam’s hand shot out and took Hannibal’s jaw in his grip, tilting the man’s face toward the scattered moonlight to better see him.

One cheek had several deep gashes across it, his lips were split in several places and his nose was bruised, the bridge cut as well. Hannibal let Liam twist his head side to side to take in the injuries that had been inflicted on him.

“Someone loves you,” Liam muttered, making Hannibal look at him head on. “Let me guess. Will Graham did this to you.”

“I deserved it, I assure you,” Hannibal answered humbly.

“I had hoped you’d look more presentable.” Liam gave a dramatic sigh, hand dropping to Hannibal’s shirt and pulling at the blood stain that was there. “I suppose this will do.”

“How much did you deem the boy’s life worth if you just wanted me?” Hannibal asked as Liam straightened Hannibal’s crooked tie.

“His life was a means to an end,” was Hannibal’s answer. Hannibal did his best to keep note on the others in the room, shifting among the shadows of the ruins. There were five or six of them and he was sure that the man in the elevator shaft was more than ready to pull the trigger if he tried to do anything. “You’re is far more valuable to me. I think I just know how to pull your strings a little better than other people.”

Liam gave a smile, single hand loosening Hannibal’s tie and pulling the knot free in the silk. The tie slipped from around Hannibal’s neck and he let it go, knowing if he tried to reach for it that a bullet would be coming for him.

Liam stepped around him and Hannibal did his best to mentally keep Liam in sight without moving from where he stood. A predator and prey. Hannibal had always been described as the lion in the room. Past relationships would call him such. But the lion didn’t stand much of a chance while being circled by hungry hyenas.

In a flash, silk was wrapped around Hannibal’s neck. His fingers did their best to dig under the fabric that made him gag. A foot kicked in the back of his knee and a burning pain filled it as he fell to the concrete floor, held at attention by his own tie.

Liam rounded back to the front of Hannibal with a smirk, dangling Hannibal’s phone, that had been taken during the search, in front of Hannibal. Liam turned it on and swiped the screen open.

“You should really password protect these,” Liam warned sarcastically. “Anyone could access whatever they want on your phone. Bank accounts, pictures, your contacts.”

Hannibal gasped, fingers beginning to fall asleep as the blood drained from them, but he held as tightly as he could against the fabric, trying to keep it off his neck enough that he could breathe. There was a buzzing that was starting in his ears and his vision was blurring.

“*Danglars vit dans le regard confus du tailleur la progression de son ivresse, et se tournant vers Fernand, il dit: ‘Eh bien, vous comprenez qu'il n'est pas nécessaire de le tuer,’*” Hannibal’s voice said through the speaker of the phone that Will held against his chest, staring up at the living room ceiling from where he lied on the couch.

He had tried to throw the gift away. He had stared at it for what felt like hours with his foot on the pedal to open the lid to the garbage. He couldn’t bring himself to get rid of the device any more than he could get rid of the sickeningly swirling clouds in his core. The only thing that had made Will feel better after a heart wrenching kiss goodbye was hearing the man’s voice.

It was protective. It was kind. It was safe. It brought Will’s mind out from the darkness and back home. Hannibal was home.

Will sighed, eyes closing, trying to come to terms that this was his life now. This was the path that he had chosen and it was the path he was going to stay on. He had to do what was right, his sense of duty far stronger than his wants. And maybe that was because he had denied himself his wants his whole life. The only things that he had ever given himself were the chance to escape away to college and the amount of dogs he brought home, because those had made him happy.

Will supposed that Hannibal had been an indulgence as well. A gift he had given himself just because he wanted it. And that was horrible of Will to admit, but it was the truth. Hannibal had worked tirelessly to wear Will down until Will finally gave into his desires.

Will’s eyes opened as his phone buzzed on the coffee table. He lifted up the phone against his chest and paused Hannibal’s reading and placed that phone aside, grabbing his. He looked at the screen with a confused look. He couldn’t remember the last time the name had appeared on his screen.

Lecter-Psychiatrist

Hannibal had kept his phone off at all times. He had also taken Will’s. It was too easy to track. There was going to be a ping. Police would be searching everywhere for him in a matter of hours. And Will found himself asking for a second time that night if Hannibal would be that stupid?

No. He wouldn't. Hannibal wouldn’t have turned on his phone unless there was something very wrong and he needed to be found.

Will hesitantly hit answer and put the phone to his ear. “Hello?”

“Ah, William. How pleasant to hear your voice.”

Will frowned at the unknown tone. “It’s just Will,” he corrected. “Who is this?”

“We can discuss names later. For now, I need you to listen to me very carefully.”

Will got to his feet, chest tight at the overwhelming feeling of trouble. He went to his room and pulled open the top drawer of his dresser and dug into it, finding his gun.

“Are you listening?”

“Intently,” Will replied coolly, trapping the phone between his ear and his shoulder so that he could check to see if the magazine was loaded with rounds. He shoved the mag back into his hand gun and then fetched a spare mag, sliding both into the back of the waistband of his jeans. Will froze at a choking sound, a gagging over the line. “Hannibal,” Will whispered, a burst of adrenaline shooting through him, sending him from potential energy into kinetic. Will raced from his room and to his front door, snatching up his coat and his car keys and rushing from the house, nearly slipping on the ice of the front deck. “If you hurt-”

“I’m not hurting him,” the voice interrupted. “Let’s cut the threats and the bargaining, shall we?” There was a deep sigh. “You want him back, I want you here.”

“Where is here?” Will asked as he climbed into his car, starting it and pulling from the driveway as quickly as he could.

“Hall Mansion, Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania. You’ll be able to see it from I-81.”

“What am I looking for exactly?” Will asked, as he sped down the road.

“You will know it when you see it.”

“N-No!” Will’s eyes flickered around the road ahead of him at warning that Hannibal was giving him. Breath stolen from Hannibal, but he was fighting enough to try to protect him. “Don’t Will.” Hannibal choked out and then gurgled gasping.

“Shut him up please,” the clearer voice on the phone ordered with an annoyed sigh, the line ending before Will could find his voice. Will lowered his phone, pulling up his maps and quickly typing in Hall Mansion into the search bar. With it found, Will pushed on the gas knowing he had to make this two hour drive as short as he possibly could despite the snow that was beginning to fall and blanket the road.

The voice on the phone hadn't been wrong. Will knew what he was looking for the moment he found it despite the flurrying snow. Even in the dark and the storm, a decrepit tower hovered over the tree line, like a lighthouse on a cliff.

Will nearly missed the turn that headed into the group of trees, skidding as he turned onto what he was certain was a dirt road under all of the snow. He drove until he came to an open gate and pushed through it, following the road further and further into the trees, ignoring the threat and punishment of the trespassing signs.

The car came to a stop and Will ignored the voice on his phone telling him he had arrived at his destination. He got from the car, an immediate chill to the bone filling him as the snow whipped at his face. He pulled his thin jacket closer around his body and stepped his way through the gathered snow until he reached the large tower, trying to find a way into the abandoned place.

Will knew better by now that the trouble that Hannibal always called to himself had a flair for the dramatic. Liked to try to impress the killer, show him they were something worth noting in their insignificant world. And that's what this tower was. It was dramatic and attention seeking. They would be in there.

Will wandered around the tower that crawled into the sky, disappearing into the storm clouds. Through exposed brick and rock work, Will eventually found a doorway that was half collapsed and looked as if it had once been licked by flames. Someplace unstable and near collapsing as well.

He stepped around a thicket of dead vines and pulled himself up into the doorway, the rocks cold against his skin as he found a graffitied ledge across a large gap in the floor that fell down into darkness, two by fours sticking out of the shadows.

Will jumped to the ledge, and once stable, glanced about until he located the beginnings of a spiral staircase leading up, the steps made of rotting wood. With careful steps, Will was carried upward a flight or two before the stairs ended and he had to stretch to step up onto another ledge.

His hands held tightly to a beam to help pull him up and he found himself in a spacious room with tall windows and that was missing two walls, the other two slowly falling back to the earth too. In the middle of the room that was capturing snow was a single kitchen chair sitting hauntingly alone.

Will pushed on, finding another doorway that was full of more rotting wood and a straight up view of the tower. Will looked up, blinking in the snow that was coming in from open windows all the way up the hallowed tower.

The closer he looked, the more he began to place what this odd building was. It didn't make sense as to why it was here, in the middle of nowhere, but it was an elevator shaft. The dimensions were right and next to a set of ladders that went all the way up the shaft were large rusted cables that would have been capable of holding the moving room.

With hands out to hold onto anything that Will could grasp, Will climbed from the doorway, over another dark pit and to a creaking two by four. Will's feet kept his balance until he was able to reach another wooden landing under the ladders.

With shivering hands and frozen fingers, Will clasped at the icy metal of the ladder and slowly began to climb upwards, hoping that the brackets weren't rusted through and would hold his weight.

The first few floors had landings much like the first one, covered in peeling paint, graffiti, and debris. But after about the fifth or sixth floor, the landing stopped as if someone had just forgot that they should have existed.

Will's teeth chattered in the cold, fingers numb and red as he forced his aching muscles to continue climbing upwards, shoes barely clinging to the steps in the snow. He had to stop every now and then and simply wrap his arms around the rails to hide his hands in his jacket to try to warm them enough that he could keep climbing.

Will had lost count of the floors by the time he reached the very top of the elevator shaft and pushed himself through a window and up into the blustering wind and driving snow. His curls were stuck to his face in a cold sweat as his body shivered trying to keep itself warm.

The concrete pad that made up the roof was no more than eight feet by eight feet. The concrete was old and cracked down the middle, no railings for protection and at the other side of the landing from Will stood several men.

Two wore all black, were rather broad and Will knew they were the muscle. The next one was a man, wrapped in a nice coat. He had dark thick hair that was gelled down enough that the curls didn't stick up like Will's did. His face was not thin, but not horridly wide, something proportionate to his body. And it was hard to be sure with only moonlight to see, but Will was certain he recognized the man.

He held a gun out and to Hannibal who was on his knees, nearly sitting on the edge of the roof, something tied around his neck. A rope of some kind, looking tighter than it needed to be. Will's eyes followed the length of the rope and round it secured to a bent piece of rebar that had been exposed through the old concrete. His arms were tied to his sides, the rope wrapped all the way around the man's torso, mummifying him.

"This is your game," Will called above the wind. "What are the rules we're playing by?"

"Let's not get ahead of ourselves just yet," the man with the gun answered, his smile only looking more menacing in the shadows. "I believe introductions are in order. Lovely to meet you Will Graham. My name is Doctor Liam Jefferies. I am Hannibal's surgeon and attending physician."

"You seem to be attending to him very well."

"Sassy and cute," Liam said with a bright laugh, glancing down at Hannibal. "I see why you like him."

Will frowned. "With pleasantries out of the way, would you mind finishing up your evil monologue so that I can get to work?" Will reached behind himself and pulled his gun free, aiming it through the snow and at Liam, trying to keep his trembling hands steady in the cold, finger numb against the trigger.

Liam simply gave a laugh, hand up to stop the two muscles that tried to step forward. "Someone's a little eager. I didn't know you had trained him so well, Dr. Lecter. Bravo." Will's eyes widened, but his heart stayed surprisingly steady as Liam's foot met Hannibal's chest and he pushed just slightly until Hannibal was off balance, leaning over the edge of the concrete ledge.

“I think we can both agree that you are going to do exactly as I say or Dr. Lecter will decorate this place with his corpse,” Liam announced. Will’s eyes dropped down to Hannibal who looked dazed and barely aware of his surroundings and Will wondered if they had drugged him or if he had been hit over the head hard enough to throw him for a loop. “Throw your gun over the side.”

Will inhaled deeply, the cold burning his throat and lungs. His hair was damp and clung to his face now. He shifted on his feet, hands still holding tightly to his gun. He could just pull the trigger, but then the two other men would most likely take care of Hannibal before Will could reach him.

Liam had the upper hand and Will knew it. He had been in this situation many times before. He had to play his cards right, keep up his poker face, not give away his tell. Always playing in other’s games for their amusement and not his own.

Will’s eyes dropped back down to Hannibal who was numbly shaking his head, through the fogginess and clouds, still begging Will not to pick him. Telling Will to be selfish for once and take something for himself. And Will was going to be selfish. He would pick exactly what he wanted and it wasn’t to save himself. It was to protect Hannibal. To save his monster so that he could continue to live and darken Will’s mind until the end of days. Will wasn’t sure if he could live separated from Hannibal. They were too conjoined. Even when Will couldn’t remember, he was still searching for the man, part of himself missing until he had found it in this killer.

Will lowered the gun down to his side, eyes not leaving Hannibal as he carefully walked over the slick concrete to the edge of the tower.

“That’s a good boy. Over the side,” Liam instructed, pushing a little more on Hannibal’s chest. Hannibal wobbled slightly, fingers trying to reach out to find purchase on something despite the fact they were held tightly to his side.

With a glare, Will tossed his gun over the edge, watching as it disappeared into the snowstorm that surrounded them. He would have to find it after. The police would surely be coming eventually. Hannibal’s phone had pinged, there were signs saying there were cameras all over the property. One of them had to be working. There had to be someone who knew they were here.

“He’s like a dog, isn’t he?” Liam questioned Hannibal. “Your little pet.”

Hannibal breathed hard and stared out at the raven in the snow. Wings large and black, threatening. They bristled with anger, dark eyes alight with flames.

When, with many a flirt and flutter, in there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore; not the least obeisance made he; not a minute stopped or stayed he but, with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door. Perched, and sat, and nothing more.

Will was still as Liam motioned one of his men forward and he began to search Will with rough hands.

“While you’re being looked over,” Liam started, releasing his foot from Hannibal’s chest and simply pressing the barrel of his gun against the man’s head. “I believe you’ve had a decent enough chance to look me over as well.” Liam glanced over to Will who, much to Liam’s dislike, stayed completely silent, eyes ablaze. “I’m sure you recall my brother.” Still silent. A magazine was tossed over the edge of the tower to join the gun, but Will was otherwise clean. Liam was a little more disappointed that the former cop and big shot in the FBI didn’t come more prepared. “You took a bite out of him, if I recall.”

“He didn’t taste very good,” Will finally commented, rising to the bate.

Liam gave a snort of laughter. “I’m sure your palate is far more refined than mine if you have been dining with Dr. Lecter as long as I believe you have. But I would not have indulged on my brother.”

“Were you trying to make a point here?” Will questioned as he was led across the roof and stood in front of Liam, the bodyguard’s hand holding tightly to Will’s arm. “You being Cordell’s brother does not impress me and he had his fate coming to him, if you want to know my opinion. He tried to steal my face. I think the punishment fits the crime.”

“He really is adorable, isn’t he?” Liam questioned with a delighted smile, looking down at Hannibal once more. “Such a wicked tongue.”

“Let’s move this along,” Will grumbled with a sigh, his breath being swept away into the storm that was not letting up. If anything it was getting worse, the wind roaring through the air, snow sharp as ice. “Why did you want me here? It isn’t to get back at the death of your brother or Hannibal would already be dead. What is it about me that has you so curious?”

Liam smiled. “You are as good as they say.”

“It’s not a difficult conclusion to come to,” Will answered, ignoring the way his clothes were beginning to stick to his body from the snow. He glanced down to Hannibal once more now that he was a bit closer and the snow wasn’t blinding him as much. Hannibal had been stripped down to his undershirt and boxers and was shivering. Will was sure that his lips would be blue under the duct tape. “What do you want with me?”

“I want to replace you.”

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly spoken, “Doubtless,” said I, “what it utters is its only stock and store caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore—Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore of ‘Never—nevermore’.”

Black wings shook off snow and bowie knife of a beak was sharp in glower.

Will gave a snort of laughter and looked down at Hannibal and back up at Liam, smile across his cold lips. “Replace me?” He gave another laugh. “He was leaving me tonight. I don’t know why you needed to replace me.”

“I don’t think you quite understand the grasp you hold over dear Dr. Lecter,” Liam mused, looking down at the tied up man with a gentle gaze. “He would never really be mine if you were there.”

“You love him then?”

Liam shook his head. “I’ve found myself longing for his company, missing our conversations that are always too short, wishing he paid me the same amount of attention he gives the simple mention of your name. If that is love, then...” Liam gave a small shrug. “All I know is that I want him and you are in the way. He won’t accept me if you are still alive and his every waking thought and dream. He will always hold resentment.”

“He will resent you for killing me,” Will pointed out.

"He won't have anyone else but me," Liam added softly. "I will make sure that I am everything he needs until the resentment is gone."

Will was about to argue that it would never happen, but wasn't that exactly what had happened to him? He allowed himself to be so completely swallowed in Hannibal that the resentment turned to friendship and affection and then to... love? He supposed there wasn't another word for it. Not one in any language that he could speak anyways.

But Hannibal wasn't one to forgive. That was why his kill count was so high, though Will didn't know the exact body count. He never forgave an unjust action. Hannibal would kill Liam if anything happened to Will. Even if they kept Hannibal drugged for the rest of his life, he would find a way to take Liam down.

"You're killing him, you know?" Will looked over the shivering form of Hannibal whose eyes were a little more alert now, though still deeply foggy. "You can't keep him in the cold like this."

"I am well aware of what the human body can withstand," Liam grumbled, a frown coming to his face. He gave a nod and Will felt his arm being pulled and a grip stronger than his drug him across the roof until he was at the side of the building.

A gasp left him as he was shoved over the edge, his shoes barely touching the rooftop. The only thing that kept him from a fall being the muscle's strong grip on his arm. Will closed his eyes and licked at his frozen lips, willing his breathing to steady, his grip deathly tight on the sleeve of the man's coat as if that would save him if the man decided to throw him off the building.

There was something muffled that came from Hannibal, the first noise that was obviously a warning to Will, coming from his mouth causing Liam's blood to boil.

"Just as the human body can withstand major impacts," Liam continued, leaving Hannibal's side and coming to stand beside Will's dangling body. "The human body has a fifty percent chance of survival when falling from four stories, the chances jump to ten percent when you reach seven stories. You're smart. I'm sure you can do the math that sixteen stories means."

"Suicide is how I die?" Will asked curiously, mouth dry as his fingers ached from holding onto the other man. He glanced over his shoulder and could only find swirling snow, no ground. He wouldn't know when he would hit. He couldn't prepare himself. He couldn't wade into the quiet of the stream, not while he was falling to the earth.

Liam gave a shrug. "Accidental death. Slipped on ice while trespassing."

"That doesn't sound quite as fun, does it?" Will asked. A single foot slipped and Will's hands desperately searched for some purchase while his free foot reached back to the concrete slab.

Liam gave another nod and Will was pulled from the edge and tossed to the ground, landing beside Hannibal's body and the legs of the other man. Will curled up, hand reached down for his knife. He carefully pulled it from his boot and flicked it open.

"Suicide would be fun," Liam contemplated. "It would be easy enough to send a note through text on your phone. Pick him up, will you?"

Will watched as the man beside Hannibal stepped over to Will. As soon as his legs were in reaching distance, Will curled the knife around one of the man's ankles and pulled the blade through it as strongly as he could.

The man gave a scream and dropped to the ground, clutching at the jagged cut that Will had given him. Will sat up and swiftly brought the knife back down in the man's upper thigh before pulling the blade free and leaving the man on the ground.

Will got to his feet and did his best to ignore the blood that was now freely flowing from the man's severed artery and covering his boots. With a deep breath, his eyes met Liam who looked more amused than upset at the mess that Will had created.

He gave a laugh, much to Will's surprise. He pointed to the man beside him and kept a smile on his face.

"He missed your knife."

Will wasn't sure what was so funny about the situation until the smile fell from Liam's face and he pulled the gun trained on Hannibal up.

A crack rang out and Will jumped, blinking several times as the other muscle crumpled to his knees, blood trickling down his face from a bullet that had gone through his temple. He slumped over, gaze blank and up at the sky.

Will's eyes returned to Liam who now had the gun aimed at Will, bright red blood across Liam's cheek, though he didn't seem perturbed by it. He looked calm and composed.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling, by the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore, "Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou," I said, "art sure no craven, ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore—Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!"

Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

"I have a short fuse," Liam said by way of explanation. "And only one of us is climbing down this tower with Dr. Lecter and it's not going to be you. You don't bring a knife to a gunfight, William."

The trigger was pulled and an explosion echoed through the snow. The pressure was what Will noticed first. And then red hot stickiness soaked his coat. The pain didn't come though and Will knew better than to look. If he looked, he would fall. If he gave any mind to the bullet in his arm, he wouldn't live through this. He needed to stay focused on the man in front of him. Completely and utterly focused if he wanted to survive.

He inhaled deeply, knowing that he couldn't get closer without a bullet meeting another part of him and for once he was grateful that his father had made him join baseball when he was younger. He pulled back his hand and threw his knife.

The gun went off once more, but fell to the ground, skidding through the snow that was melting away from steaming blood from the man Will had stabbed. Liam gave a cry of pain and Will took the opportunity to move forward as Liam pulled the knife from the palm of his hand.

The distance wasn't hard to make up, Will scooping up the gun and placing it to Liam's forehead as the man cradled his injured hand to his chest. Without a moment of hesitation, Will pulled the trigger.

It was easy. It shocked him how easily it came to him when before he couldn't bring himself to look Garret Jacob Hobbs in the face after using ten rounds. It was so easy after taking out Randell Tier. It was so easy after his mental breakdown in homicide that had sent him into teaching.

Pulling the trigger was easy until the empty click of a vacant chamber.

There was a laugh and the gun was battered away from Will's hand, flying off the edge of the tower and disappearing into the night. Liam raised his hand up, bloodied knife dripping. Will caught his wrist before the blade could hit him. But the doctor was smart. He had always been smart.

A fist plowed into Will's arm, the pain explosive. A piercing, elevated sort of pain that sent Will's knees buckling and he collapsed to the rooftop, clutching his bleeding arm in his hand.

Liam was swift to shove Will onto his back, sitting on his chest, knife coming back down towards Will's face.

Weak, trembling and blood slick hands caught Liam's wrist and held the knife at bay. It loomed over Will, his arms unable to keep his hold. Will turned his head away, willing the strength in his arms to push the downwards pressure away, but the warmth of his blood began to fill his ear as the blade sliced effortlessly through his cheek.

Will shoved his knee up and into Liam's back, knocking Liam over the top of Will and across the rooftop. Will scrambled to his knees and dove for the knife that had skittered away into the gumminess of the blood that was surely painting the side of the tower by now.

Liam staggered to his feet and nearly jumped as the knife blade was pressed into his neck. Will pressed as hard as he could, not daring for a second to be gentle, his hand snatching up Liam's shoulder and pushing him back. Warmth trickled down Liam's neck as the blade of the knife nicked into his skin. Liam's hands snatched at Will's arm, clinging to Will with nails sharp as they dug into the bloodied sleeve of Will's coat.

Will stopped, eyes flickering over Liam's blood streaked face with a glare, breathing hard, no longer cold or shaky. No longer weak and timid and afraid.

"I don't normally enjoy taking a life, Doctor Liam Jefferies," Will hissed out through clenched teeth, adding more force to the shoulder in his grip. "But this was your design."

With a large step forward, Will forced Liam back and watched as the terror filled his eyes, his feet losing traction on the concrete floor as he fell. Fell back and over the edge. Fell the sixteen stories to the frozen ground.

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting and his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming, and the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor; and my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor.

Shall be lifted—nevermore!

Will turned and rushed over to Hannibal, kneeling in the blood and cutting at the ropes around Hannibal's middle. Once free, Hannibal's body sagged tiredly, his arms wrapping around his body in search of warmth from his snowy wet clothes. Will pulled at the duct tape over Hannibal's mouth and placed a deep kiss to Hannibal's lips, ignoring the bitter taste of the adhesive.

“You attract too much crazy for your own good,” Will said as he went to work untying the rope that was around Hannibal’s neck. The skin around Hannibal’s neck was a bloody purple mess and Hannibal gasped, coughing violently as frozen air rushed into his lungs. He leaned forward, trembling fingers clasping into Will’s jacket. “Can you walk? We need to get down.”

Will got to his feet and without waiting for an answer, pulled Hannibal up with him. Hannibal stumbled as his knees gave out at the weight and his feet and calves tingled at the rush of blood that shot through them. Will caught Hannibal against him and held him close.

“I need you to stay strong, Hannibal,” Will said in a stern tone, hands taking the man’s face and forcing those drugged eyes to look at him as the snow continued to flurry around them. “You can’t rest yet. We need to get you down.”

Hannibal gave a weak nod and his bare feet stepped through the blood that was tar black and towards the ladders, Will following with a hand to the small of Hannibal’s back.

The trip down the ladder was slow going, Will going first so that he could attempt, though success was doubtful, to catch Hannibal if the man fell. Luckily it didn’t come to such lengths and once they were outside and in the snow, Will pointed to the car, shoving the keys into Hannibal’s hands.

“Go get in, get the heater going. There’s a blanket on the back seat. It’s normally for the dogs, but it's better than nothing.”

Hannibal obeyed without a word and Will glanced up at the elevator shaft, finding which side his gun would have been thrown from. He searched until his hands were burning from the cold and eventually found his gun, but couldn’t find where his magazine had fallen.

Will stood upright and stopped, eyes landing on a body. The man lay, face upturned to the sky, staring into the heavens. Eyes were wide with the terror still in them, but they were dark. Blood trickled from the corners of his mouth and from his nose, body broken in too many places to ever try to fix.

He looked at peace in the snow that was beginning to cover his body, cradling his limbs in freezing lace and crimson as dark as pitch.

With a deep breath, Will tore his eyes from the doctor and began his trek back to the car whose headlights were now on as well as the windshield wipers. Will kept his eyes tight on the car, trying to push down the same feeling he had when he had killed Hobbs. That immense sense of power and control that he normally didn’t hold in his own life. The feeling of being a God in a person suit. The feeling of being right.

And Will knew he should feel bad or guilty or sick that he had just taken a life, but those were so easily washed away when Will knew it was Liam or him. One of them had to walk away and Will made sure it was him. And maybe when Hannibal was back in his right mind, he would be proud of Will. Will was certain of it and the vision of praise that Will conjured for himself helped dull the pain of his arm.

A hospital was out of the question and Alana’s house was too far away and so Will found himself at a crappy motel with burned out lights on their sign. He left Hannibal in the car, heater still going and, ignoring the looks from an older couple that were unpacking their car, Will entered the lobby, not bothering to kick the snow from his boots. It was better to keep the snow caked into the soles instead of potentially leaving bloody footprints in a motel lobby, even one as rundown as this one.

The teen at the counter looked half asleep and was eating cheetos boredly. His eyes flickered up to Will and he immediately sat upright with a questioning look, fingers trailing cheeto dust down the front of his shirt as he tried to clean them.

“I need a room,” Will said, shoving his hands into his pockets and looking around the lobby as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

“Is that blood?” the teen asked.

Will looked back at the boy and gave a confused look as if he didn’t know what the teen was talking about. He licked at his lips and gave a small nod. “Yes, it is. A single Queen is fine. Working shower if you would.”

“Is that your blood?”

Will sighed and gave another nod, more than a little annoyed. “Yes. It’s my blood. Do you have a room available?”

“I don’t think-”

“Here,” Will interrupted, reaching into his back pocket and pulling out his wallet. “The room must be about 80 a night.” Will dug through the cash that was there. “Here’s two hundred.” Will placed the cash on the counter. “Do you have a room available?”

With keys now in hand, Will jogged back out to the car and turned it off, looking over at Hannibal who sat wrapped in a dog hair covered blanket, with a bit more color to his cheeks and eyes a little brighter.

Will helped Hannibal from the car and led him to their room, unlocking the door and ushering Hannibal in so the man wasn’t standing barefoot in the snow. Once in the room, Will rushed to the thermostat and turned it up as high as it would go, a weakness coming to his muscles as the feeling of safety started to crash into him.

“Let’s get you cleaned up,” Will stated, moving past Hannibal and to the door of the bathroom. He went and started the shower and returned to Hannibal who had folded and placed the blanket aside. His wet clothes clung to his frame and Will knew he was pretending not to shiver.

‘We need to take care of your arm Will,” Hannibal stated, words slightly slurred, but much better than whatever conversation he had been trying to hold in the car.

“We will worry about that when you are a bit more clear headed and warm. Come with me,” Will instructed, taking Hannibal’s hand, coating it in blood, and pulling him to the bathroom. “Get undressed. I’ll be back in a moment.” Will left the motel room and went back out to his car, digging through it for his 72 hour kit. It would be enough to get them through the night. In the morning he would have to go pick up some stuff.

Will set the backpack on the bed and went for the bathroom, it not even occurring to him to knock before he stepped in. Will paused, eyes landing on the man in the steaming spray of the shower. His eyes followed the line of Hannibal’s bruised body, lines of black and purple from where the ropes had been holding him still.

Hannibal's body was more toned than Will thought it would be, though he knew that Hannibal liked to swim to stay in shape. Will quickly looked away, more to give the man some privacy than from being embarrassed.

No. He wasn't embarrassed tonight. He was strong and powerful and a god. He was bold. He stripped down himself, working the jacket carefully over his stiffening arm and climbed into the shower beside Hannibal.

Hannibal didn't look at all bothered by the suddenly shared space. Will thought he could see the man's body relax at Will's closeness. His hand reached out, taking Will's arm that was still bleeding and examining it with narcotically glazed maroon eyes.

"The bullet's still in there. You shouldn't be getting this wet."

"I've been shot before, Hannibal," Will assured calmly, jaw clenched as he let the water clean him, Hannibal stepping out of the way to give Will some room. "I will be ok. Just another story to tell my grandchildren if I live to see that day." There wasn't an answer, but the air was still pleasantly content between them. "How are you feeling?"

"Tired. Stiff. Cold."

Will stepped out of the water and took Hannibal's hips in his hands, pushing Hannibal into the spray. "Get warm," Will instructed. "I can't have you dying on me."

"Not now," Hannibal agreed, hands taking Will's wrists and pulling Will's hands around his bare waist until Will was under the water with him, chest to chest. Will's eyes slid closed, arms resting on Hannibal's hips naturally as Hannibal's fingers began to gently scrub at the dried blood on Will's face. Finger's laced into Will's hair and tugged at it, exposing his neck to the heat of the water. Hannibal leaned down and licked at the water on Will's neck. "You killed someone. You're fairly calm."

"I feel... serene," Will muttered, letting Hannibal continue to clean the blood from his skin that was quickly turning the bottom of the shower a muddy red. "It felt good. I liked it."

Hannibal simply gave a small hum in answer, something pleased in the tone. "You didn't have to come for me," Hannibal muttered, as he used one of the small shampoos to fill his hand. Will relaxed into the grip that was back in his hair as Hannibal worked the soap into Will's curls, fingers massaging into Will's scalp.

"Yes, I did," Will disagreed. "I will always come for you, Hannibal."

"And why is that?" Hannibal led Will into the water and Will let the man wash all of the shampoo from his curls, just enjoying the feeling of being close to Hannibal again after having forced himself to come to terms that he would never see the doctor again.

"You would get me the moon even if I simply implied I wanted it in passing." With hair cleaned and blood cleaned from his body, Will let himself focus on Hannibal, fingers gingerly washing each of the bruises down Hannibal's arms and across his torso. "And I would give my life to you if it meant you got to live on."

Hannibal winced as Will's fingers lifted his chin to get a better look at the older man's neck. His neck was decorated with a splattering of purples, blacks, blues, reds and yellows that made a lace spider’s web across the swollen skin that had been cut into.

“Why is that?” Hannibal asked again, voice weaker now.

Will’s eyes flickered up at the paling man’s face and he took Hannibal’s hips, guiding the man gently to the bottom of the shower as his knees shook. Will tipped Hannibal’s head back once more, Hannibal licking his lips, eyes shut tight at the hard laboring rough fingers made gentle work of cleaning the cut.

Will didn’t think about the words that came from his lips. He didn’t need to. They came from him naturally, plainly, effortlessly.

“I love you, Hannibal.”

The air was sucked from the room as Hannibal’s eyes snapped open in confusion. He took Will’s hands to stop their work at his neck and lowered his head, catching Will’s god sent, Botticelli painted blue eyes.

Will tried to take in Hannibal’s expression, one of shock, one that Will had never seen Hannibal make before. An expression that did not belong on the man’s face, but one that Will found himself becoming extremely fond of. It wasn’t often he was able to get such a strong reaction out of the man.

“What’s that look for?” Will asked with a smile. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen your face do that before.” Will’s eyes stared into Hannibal’s, the man’s mouth obviously too frozen to answer. “I’ve... never said it to you before, have I?”

Hannibal gave a small shake of his head, the move very minute so that he wouldn’t hurt himself. "Just once, a long time ago," Hannibal replied softly. "I never thought I would hear it again." Will’s lips tipped into a crooked smile and he leaned over, kissing at Hannibal’s lips, a stickiness still there from the duct tape. But Will didn’t care. “Again?” Hannibal got out around Will’s lips.

Will chuckled and broke the kiss. “Greedy little thing, aren’t you?” he teased, certain that Hannibal had used the same line on him before. “I love you, Hannibal.” Will placed another kiss to Hannibal’s mouth, feeling the way that Hannibal nearly melted with a sharp inhale at the contact. “Let’s finish washing you up. I need to work on my arm.”

The 72 hour kit did come in handy and Hannibal chocked it up to the man having been an officer and possibly a boy scout, always taught to be prepared. There was a warm change of clothes for each of them, some food and water, items like maps and compasses as well as a mediocre med kit meant for minor cuts and bruises. But it would have to work.

Hannibal’s eyes were fully back to their normal sheen, whatever drug they had given him finally worn off. He still looked a little cold, but Will knew he wouldn’t admit it. Will sat on the edge of the bed in lounge pants with a shirt to the side, ready to throw on once his arm was fixed.

Hannibal frowned as he opened the med kit, but didn’t say anything as he sat facing Will and took Will’s arm in his grip, wiping at it with an alcohol wipe. He handed Will some gauze and Will placed it just below the hole in his arm as Hannibal pulled out a pair of sad looking plastic tweezers.

“This isn’t going to feel good, *varnas,*” Hannibal warned as he dug into the open wound. Will inhaled sharply, free hand clutching to the fabric at his thighs.

“What’s *varnas*?” Will asked out through a tight set jaw, feeling the instrument moving around inside of himself, like there was something crawling under his skin.

“Raven.” Will groaned, head lowering. “Hush, *mylimasis.* I nearly have it,” Hannibal informed softly. There was a gasp of relief as the bullet was finally pulled from Will’s arm and placed into the gauze that Will still held to catch the blood that was still free flowing. Hannibal used another wipe to clean at the wound and then placed fresh gauze over the hole and then wrapped it off. Hannibal took the gauze from Will’s hand and went to the garbage to throw it away.

Will got to his feet and grabbed his t-shirt, pulling it over his head stiffly. Once that was on, he gathered up everything and began shoving it back into the pack, eyes closing for a moment as Hannibal’s hands took his hips, chin resting on Will’s shoulder.

“*Tu padarei tai man daug sunkiau, mano meile*,” Hannibal whispered in Will’s ear and Will shivered, pulling from Hannibal’s grip to put the pack by the door. “*Kaip aš tave dabar palieku?*”

“I don’t want to know what that means, do I?” Will questioned. He double checked to make sure that the door was securely locked and the curtains were pulled tight. He then moved over to the bedside table, picking up his gun and looking over it.

“I don’t think you do,” Hannibal agreed with a small nod watching as Will let the magazine drop from the gun, checking it before shoving the magazine back into place. Will set the gun aside and picked up his knife, examining it with a small frown. He closed the blade back up and rested it next to the gun. “How long are we staying here?”

“Until morning,” Will replied. “Liam used your phone to call me. I’m sure that Jack would have your phone on alert. It might take until tomorrow for them to find that your phone was used, but they will be racing here as fast as they can.”

“I think Liam still had my phone.” Hannibal gave a small shrug. “It was for emergencies. I have no use for one. I have no *real* use for one.”

“You should rest,” Will stated, pointed to the bed as if Hannibal were a child. “I’ll make sure-”

“They won’t find us tonight. You said so yourself. Come sleep with me.”

Will shook his head, ignoring the heat in his cheeks. “I would feel much better if I keep watch.”

Hannibal gave him a gentle smile in disagreement and stepped around the bed to where Will stood. He lifted Will’s chin so that he could look into lovely blue eyes that were so alive, still pumping adrenaline through them despite the ordeal behind them. Right behind them, Hannibal supposed, but it was over and done with.

“Will you do me a favor?” Hannibal questioned.

“Anything.”

That made Hannibal grin, canines catching the lamp light. “Check in on Morgan with Alana. I need to know the boy’s condition.” Hannibal released Will, leaving Will confused, but Will gave a small nod, pulling his phone from his pocket and dialing Alana's number.

It gave a single ring before it was hurriedly answered. "Will," Alana gasped out, sounding like she had been crying.

"Hi," he said softly, eyes watching Hannibal carefully as the man lay down on the bed, movements inflexible and rough, almost mechanical. "Are you ok?"

"Will, Hannibal-"

"He's here with me," Will interrupted, eyes not leaving the doctor whose eyes were closed, hands folded on his chest, rising and falling with his steady breath.

"With you?" Alana's voice cracked. "He's alright? Margot said that he stayed behind."

Will wasn't sure what Alana was referring to, but he didn't push at it. "I found him." It wasn't a lie, but now there was more of a story that Hannibal wasn't telling him. "He asked about Morgan?"

"We're still in the ER, but he's stable at the moment."

What had happened to the kid?

Hannibal's face was aggravatingly blank as Will tried to piece these random shards together in a picture that was missing more than half of it.

"I'm glad he's doing ok," Will said softly. Hannibal's eyebrows rose and Will frowned.

"Tell him..." Alana trailed off with a choked sob. "Tell him thank you. He saved my son."

"I will," Will answered softly. "Keep me posted, will you?"

"Of course." Alana sniffled and there were some muffled sounds in the background. "Will, he's awake. I need to-"

"Go," Will instructed. "Be with your son."

"Thank you."

Will lowered the phone, ending the call and placed the phone on the bedside table, eyes landing on Hannibal who's expression had once more settled into a blank one. There was a thick silence in the room and it gathered there for a moment or two more before Hannibal's eyes opened and he looked to Will.

"Morgan is ok?"

"He's stable, just woke up."

"Good," Hannibal said with a small nod.

"Alana says thank you."

"She doesn't need to thank me." Will strode around the side of the bed until he was towering over Hannibal, who simply met the empath's challenging gaze. He wanted an explanation, the detective in him never able to sit quiet if it didn't have its answers. "Liam kidnapped the boy. I was the ransom," Hannibal said, watching Will's face for any small changes in expression so he knew how to word his story. When Will didn't give him any hints, Hannibal continued on. "He was nearly drowned in that pond that was there. I helped Margot get the boy out and stayed behind."

"Why?" The question was blunt, the words sharp. "You didn't have to."

"There's a lot of things we don't have to do, Will." Hannibal sat up and placed his feet back on the floor.

"You care about the kid."

"He was pleasant company in the lack of yours," Hannibal agreed. "I did grow fond of him."

"Children don't seem like your forte," Will pointed out, folding his arms with a wince.

"I do not mind the thought of children. Some are far more agreeable than others, but there's nothing wrong with them."

"You wouldn't kill a child?"

Hannibal frowned and gave Will an offended look. "Children do not know the way of the world. They speak what's on their minds with complete honesty and with no ill intentions. They are not rude and do not deserve a fate of someone who knows better than them. I do not enjoy the thought of killing a child."

Will gave a small chuckle, a smile brightening his lips. "You have such odd morals." Hannibal got to his feet and Will let himself be pulled closer. "You know," Will whispered. "Saving people puts color in your cheeks."

"As killing does to yours." Hannibal placed a kiss to Will's forehead and his hand caressed Will's check. "There's something else that you're not telling me, Will. You want something. I can see it in your stance."

Will quickly pulled back and went around to the other side of the bed, leaving Hannibal watching and waiting for an answer. "It's nothing." Will replied, picking up his phone as a form of distraction. "It doesn't matter."

"Will," Hannibal said sternly, causing Will to look up at the man across the bed from him. "What is on your mind, *mano mielasis*?"

"It's still my birthday," Will said sheepishly, hand ruffling up his curls like it always did when he was nervous. "And I want it to end well."

"What do you want from me, Will?" It was Hannibal's turn to step around the bed, standing in front of Will. "I will get you the moon even if you only imply you want it."

Will smiled, eyes down on the dirty carpet beneath his feet. "I know that tomorrow you will be leaving. I don't expect you to stay and I still can't go with you, but... Can I have all of tonight? Your focus solely on me?" Will glanced up, breath stolen from him at the gentleness on Hannibal's features.

“Solely on you?” Hannibal echoed, stepping closer to Will. “Are you that desperate to have something of me that no one else has?” Hannibal watched as a light dusting of flush filled Wil’s cheeks at the comment.

“Hannibal,” he whispered, eyes still down on the floor, the word not as stern and demanding as it had been a month or so ago. “Only I should be allowed to know anything about you.”

“Should you?” Hannibal teased softly, only causing the blush to deepen across the empath’s skin. Will’s eyes met Hannibal’s, much to Hannibal’s surprise, and he found a begging in the blue. Hannibal smiled faintly and pulled Will against his body. “How should I worship you tonight?”

Will shivered at the words that were whispered in his ear, listening to Hannibal’s heart beat in his chest. A strong and steady pulse that told Will Hannibal was still fully alive.

“I want you to lie to my face,” Will answered softly in Hannibal’s chest. “Show me there’s a future here, even if you’ve never really seen one. Fake it. Pretend you’re staying. Don’t be honest to me.” Hannibal’s grip tightened on Will. “I want you to hold me and I want to dance with you until the skies are white. Touch me like there isn’t something missing, because even if you don’t stay... I don’t want my heart broken tonight, even if none of it is true.”

“You only ever have to ask,” Hannibal whispered into Will’s curls, placing a kiss to Will’s head.

Will pulled back and Hannibal watched as he dug up something on his phone. “I don’t have any good music,” he muttered as his fingers typed into his phone. “I’m not as well versed as you. I tried piano once, but gave up because the music upset me so much.” Hannibal found himself smiling. “So I just have stupid things from like movie soundtracks or odds and ends that I found on the computer.”

“Anything will be fine,” Hannibal assured.

Will searched for a while longer until he found a song he approved of and then set his phone down on the bedside table. Hannibal listened curiously as a harp played out something soft and gentle.

Will stepped closer to Hannibal and allowed himself to be pulled back into Hannibal’s gentle, ever so gentle, grip. One hand slipped into Will’s, carefully holding it in a position that didn’t hurt Will’s arm and the other circled around Will’s waist, Will hand resting against Hannibal’s chest, taking a fistful of the fabric there to hold himself in this moment, lock it away in his mind palace in that one room that was clearly made specifically for Hannibal, though shelves of files were still missing.

The sway of their bodies was light as Will let Hannibal lead him, let Hannibal press lies to his skin with soft lips and burning fingertips. Let Hannibal paint his webs over Will’s mind fully in a way that Will had never allowed him to. Will let Hannibal drag him into a false security that would fall out from under him the moment the sunlight came through the curtains, but he couldn’t bring himself to care.

Pasakyk man, mano meile: Tell me, my love.

Viskas, ką jums reikia padaryti, tai klausti, mano mylimasis: All you have to do is ask, my beloved.

Danglars vit dans le regard confus du tailleur la progression de son ivresse, et se tournant vers Fernand, il dit: ‘Eh bien, vous comprenez qu'il n'est pas nécessaire de le tuer:

Danglars saw in the tailor's confused look the progression of his intoxication, and turning to Fernand, he said: ‘Well, you understand that it is not necessary to kill him.'

mylimasis: precious

varnas: raven

Tu padarei tai man daug sunkiau, mano meile. Kaip aš tave dabar palieku?: You made it a lot harder for me, my love. How do I leave you now?

mano mielasis: my darling

Chapter End Notes

The Raven: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRUA6Jdr9K0&list=FLwLqnHcI0OXnXKnVDRRTX-Q&index=28&t=0s

Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

> "If you lie to me again," Hannibal said aggressively between his assaults to Will's lips, "I will kill you." Will shivered at the threat, entirely sure that Hannibal meant it, but not finding any reason to be worried about it. "Stop tempting me with false promises, Will. Those are still lies."

Losing You Terrifies Me

"That storm last night was crazy," Price said as he shook the snow from his hair. Zeller shot him a disapproving look at the mess the man was leaving on the floor. "It took me nearly an hour to shovel out my car."

"More snow than we've had in a long time," Zeller acknowledged with a grumble, sitting up from where he had been leaning against an empty exam table.

"This reminds me of all of those frozen corpses." Price hung up his jacket in the corner of the room and stepped down to log into his computer to check his daily spam of emails of people wondering when their testing was going to be back, knowing full well that the testing was nowhere near done and they were just going to have to wait in line like everyone else, a near six month line.

"Oh, the ice sculpture ones?" Zeller questioned, moving to stand beside his friend and frown at the 347 emails that awaited Price to answer. A similar amount that he had as well that he had spent the last hour or two restlessly searching through, holding his tongue tight on information to be shared with Jack.

"The very one," Price said with a nod and a frown. "His work would have been quite beautiful if he didn't use real people as the center of his sculptures. What that man could do with a hammer and chisel."

"Why do you think Jack came out of retirement?" Zeller pondered, wanting to move on from the killer they were discussing. He had found himself having a very difficult time with that case while they were working it. It had been one of his first, and while it wasn't gruesome, no one was ripped and gutted and being eaten, it was enough to make Zeller want to run.

"I think he just wants to catch Hannibal." Price gave a shrug, typing in answer to an email he had received that asked about something or other with the bullet casing for a shooting. "You know he didn't want anything to do with the FBI again until Will went missing. He made them reinstate him. I heard it was quite a hostile meeting."

"That could mean a lot of things concerning Jack."

"What could, Zeller?" Jack's booming voice asked as he entered the lab.

"We've got another ping. Came in last night at about eleven," Zeller announced in a hurried voice, unable to keep the news down any longer.

"What?" Price asked, turning around to give Zeller a look that said he was hurt that that hadn't been the first thing out of Zeller's mouth to him.

"Why didn't you call me?" Jack demanded, pointing at Zeller.

"I tried. You didn't answer," Zeller informed Jack, moving over to where his own computer was and pulled up the program. "Pinged just off of I-81 in Pennsylvania. It hasn't moved since. It's still there."

"Why would he turn his phone on?" Price asked as he went to pull his coat back on.

"The last time he turned it on was so that we could find Will," Jack reminded, leaving Zeller scrambling at his computer to grab his things as they left the lab. "He wants us to find something this time.”

“For all of the no trespassing signs, they didn’t do a good job locking the gate,” Price muttered as Jack drove off the road and into the deep snow.

“Are we sure this is right?” Jack questioned as he passed through the open gate and continued through a path of trees and a dark grey sky promising more of last night’s storm.

“There’s a phone tower on this property. I’m not sure how much closer we can get to the ping, Jack,” Zeller replied, working on his laptop, grateful for once that he had a hotspot on his phone that he paid a ridiculous extra amount of money for and never used.

The car eventually came to a stop in front of the rather odd looking tower that they had been able to see from the road. Jack sighed as he looked over it. “Call the local authorities,” Jack instructed as he pulled his gloves on. “The building is bleeding.”

Zeller and Price shared a quick look before leaning forward in their seats to better see what awaited them outside the warmth of the car. Surely enough, down the side of the building was a thick coating of something a dark red.

Will opened the door to the motel room and quietly stepped inside, placing the shopping on the table in the corner. He pulled out a pop tart from a box and opened the package, biting into one as he went back out to get more things that he had bought.

When he returned, he silently closed the door, eyes landing on Hannibal who was still sleeping soundly in bed, hair tousled and bruises looking permanently etched into his pale skin. Will took a seat at the table, munching on the makeshift breakfast he had snatched up quickly, noting all the details of Hannibal’s countenance.

There was something so peaceful in the way that Hannibal slept. He looked younger, the grey of his hair needing to be the dark undertones the rest of it was. Though Will did like the silver in Hannibal’s hair and would never change it. The only movement was the slight rise and fall of his chest.

It was hard to imagine that this was the same man who could kill without a second thought. In sleep he was angelic, his face as fresh as a dew drop, making gentle snuffling noises as he breathed.

Will finished off his breakfast with a small smile as he watched Hannibal sleep, enjoying how much Hannibal must trust him to sleep when Hannibal knew exactly what darkness was swirling through Will’s blood. Hannibal had awakened the darkness after all. Will just wasn’t sure if Hannibal knew how much there was, how much Will fought with it on a daily basis or if Hannibal even truly cared just how molasses like he had made Will’s insides.

With a deep breath, Will rose from his seat and threw away the trash. There was a buzzing in his pocket and Will pulled his phone free, staring at the number. Already? Will had been hoping to get a few more hours out of their time alone before he had to jump into action.

“Jack?” Will asked into the phone, trying to keep his voice low as Hannibal stirred slightly.

“Good morning Will. How are you doing?”

“A bit worn out. I didn’t sleep very well last night,” Will answered with a frown. He knew where this was going and he really, really didn’t want to deal with it. Will placed the phone between his shoulder and his ear and moved to the bags on the table and pulled out one of two bottles of bleach, a scrub brush, some gloves and some garbage bags, heading for the bathroom. “What do you want Jack?”

Will turned on the bathroom fan and opened up the window, letting the cold air into the bathroom. He opened up the shower and dropped to his knees, opening up the box of gloves, pulling some on, sure that Jack had gloves on his hands as well.

“Where are you right now?”

“Why?” Will opened up the bleach and dumped some of it into the bottom of the shower, taking the scrub brush and beginning to scrub at the tub.

“We have a murder scene here. We found a phone,” Jack explained. “Hannibal Lecter’s phone.”

Ok,” Will muttered.

“And you were the last call it made.”

Will's cleaning stopped and he pushed himself back, leaning onto his heels with a deep breath. "I got a call last night, but I didn't recognize the number. I didn't answer it. I guess Molly must have deleted his number from my phone."

"So, I'll repeat," Jack said once more. "Where are you?"

Will sighed knowing he couldn’t lie. "In a motel in Pennsylvania. Why do you need to know? You don't think I have anything to do with this, do you?"

Will's eyes went to the open bathroom door at movement and he saw Hannibal lean against the door frame with his arms folded over his chest, quietly looking over what Will was doing.

"Your phone also pinged in the area. What are you doing in Mechanicsburg?"

"Alana's son was in the ER. I was with her all night if you need to know," Will grumbled harshly, leaning back over to begin scrubbing at the shower again, trying to hide away any trace of blood that might have still been there.

He could feel a smugness come off of Hannibal and Will glanced up to see a smile playing at his lips.

"You wouldn't mind if I call her and verify that, would you?" Jack asked from the other side of the line.

"Not at all, but she's been pretty hysterical all night. Take it easy on her, Jack."

"Right," was all Jack said before hanging up.

"Bastard," Will grumbled, going into his contacts and deleting Hannibal from them in case Jack demanded to see his phone, because Will knew Alana would lie for him and he would be called to the crime scene. Well set his phone aside and went back to scrubbing at the shower. “He’s supposed to have a warrant.”

"Your lying always manages to amaze me. I can normally pick through lies, but yours are solid," Hannibal said, voice rough and scratchy, though Will couldn't blame him for the swelling that was still around his neck from the rope.

"It comes from years of holding back information in interrogations and forcing myself to believe the lies I say when I have mental breaks. You have to believe your lies. If you believe them, then they are truths."

"Interrogations?" Hannibal questioned curiously.

"They would have me do the interrogations quite often," Will explained, wincing at a twinge in his arm. He sat back on his heels and looked up at Hannibal. "I can embody any person I want essentially. I could see exactly what they didn't want me to know. And it was safer than having me behind a gun." Hannibal gave a smile and Will frowned. "Don't turn this into some kinky thing," Will said tightly, rubbing at his arm.

“I like when you’re on your knees,” Hannibal offered.

“Shut up,” Will said with a small smile.

“Is your arm hurting?”

Will gave a shrug and went back to work. “I’m just waiting for some medicine to kick in. I’ll be fine.”

“Is there anything that I can do to help you Will?”

Will shook his head with a deep breath. “I got you food and clothes. Just get ready. Jack’s bound to call me back. You can take my car and go. We’ll shove all of the evidence in there and you can go back to my house. I’ll burn it when I finally get home. There’s a spare key to the house under the wood stack on the deck. You can take the other car. The keys will be on the hook by the door. I’ll get a rental.”

“You’re kicking me out?”

Will stopped and looked up, using a gloved hand to push his glasses back up onto his nose. “I just want you safe.”

Hannibal straightened up at that, looking over Will for a moment before giving a nod. He turned and left the doorway and Will could hear him digging through the shopping on the table before Will went back to work. Once the shower was scrubbed top to bottom and to his liking, he washed the mess down the drain with more bleach, grabbed all of the soaps and lotions and threw them into a garbage bag.

He left the bathroom and looked over at Hannibal who had found the pathetic excuse for a pastry and was eating it with a small frown, obviously not enjoying the horridly large amounts of sugars and chemicals in it. But with the need of clothes and Will using nearly all of his money to pay off the clerk last night, he had to make due with something cheap and decently filling.

It made Will snort laughter to see Hannibal eating something processed and Hannibal glanced up, not saying a word, though his eyes told Will he knew what Will thought was so funny. Will’s smile didn’t drop as he grabbed his boots and tossed them into the garbage bag to be burned as well. He knelt down where the snow had melted off of his shoes and there was a hint of rusty red in the dried mess. With bleach and the scrub brush, he went about cleaning the small tile entryway.

“You’re being awfully quiet,” Will commented as he scrubbed at the blood. Hannibal got to his feet and went around to the window, opening the curtain enough that he could slide the glass open to air out the room, but kept the curtain closed so no one could see in.

The irritating odor was beginning to burn Will’s throat and lungs, but he knew this place needed to be spotless when they left. Everything would need to be cleaned immaculately. Everything they had touched needed to be thrown away or wiped down. He would have to make sure that no dog hair was left behind from the blanket and that no blood had gotten on the carpet or the bedside table from his knife. He would have to make sure his knife and gun went back with Hannibal so that if Jack had found his magazine in the massive amounts of snow, it would take them a while to match it to him and maybe he could steal it away.

“I’m enjoying watching you work,” Hannibal stated around the sad breakfast in his hand. “It’s not often that I find someone as efficient as me in cleaning up messes.”

“Can I have the paper towels please?” Will asked, holding out his hand towards Hannibal. Hannibal looked through several bags before he found the roll and handed it to Will who ripped the package open and used several paper towels to wipe up the bleach. “Thank you.” Will tossed the paper towels into the garbage bag with his shoes. Next came Will’s jacket and shirt, each going to meet the same end. “I’m going to have to scrub out my car,” he announced to the room, finding that making a mental checklist would help him remember everything he had to do before he could leave.

“I can take care of that for you, if you need,” Hannibal offered. “Before I leave.”

Will stopped in his clean up, daring to glance at Hannibal who looked more interested in the clothing that Will had bought him than at Will’s sharp jerk into personal distress. Will inhaled deeply, swallowing the overwhelming sensation and went back to work, throwing away what had been left of Hannibal’s clothes.

“Will your suit be at the crime scene?” Will asked after a moment. “And how many people were there? It didn’t seem like three was quite right.”

“It’s possible it might still be there. If it is, it will be hidden in the house beside the tower,” Hannibal answered new clothes gathered up in his arms. “And I doubt they will have started to process that part of the property yet. I think their main focus will be on the man you stabbed.” Hannibal placed the items on the bed and pulled the shirt he had borrowed from Will over his head. Will stared at the tiger stripes of bruises that decorated Hannibal’s body as Hannibal neatly folded Will’s shirt and set it aside. “As for how many were there, I was certain there were at least ten, though he may have dismissed them once I was drugged. I don’t remember.”

Will tied off the garbage bag and moved over to Hannibal, sitting on the edge of the bed and watching the man get dressed, curious if Hannibal would approve of an outfit not normally up to the man’s expensive tastes.

Hannibal slipped into a deep red long sleeve shirt that Will had found closely resembled the sweaters the man liked to wear when he wasn’t in his suit and tie. And then a pair of dark washed jeans that maybe fit a little too well and made Will rise from the bed to keep cleaning.

“Is there a problem?” Hannibal asked as he pulled on the leather jacket that Will had found him as well before sitting on the edge of the bed to put on the motorcycle riding boots that Will set beside him.

Will shook his head, unable to form words. Hannibal gave a small smile and watched as Will ignored him, gathering up the blanket and shoving it into another garbage bag and then heading over to the bedside table and adding his knife to the same bag and then his gun, which was unloaded and shoved into the plastic.

“Look at me,” Hannibal instructed, causing Will to stiffen slightly, back kept to Hannibal purposefully. He carefully set the garbage bag down.

“I don’t have time for this Hannibal,” he muttered softly, rubbing at the back of his neck. “Jack is looking for you.”

“All of your attention must always be on me,” Hannibal stated strongly, words familiar to Will. He knew that he had heard them several times before, knew well the effect they had on him.

“It is on you. It’s always on you. Right now it’s on keeping you safe.”

“Look at me, Will.” Will closed his eyes and slowly found himself turning, obeying, meeting Hannibal’s small smirk. His eyes opened and wandered down the now standing man, a feeling stirring deep inside of him and Will quickly blamed it on the strong scent of bleach that was still in the air. “You picked this on purpose,” Hannibal said, his stupid smirk still on his face. “You don’t get to ignore me.”

“Hannibal, we don’t have-”

“We have time,” Hannibal interrupted, snatching at Will’s waist and pulling Will closer. “And you deserve to bask in your own design.” Hannibal’s fingers brushed back some of Will’s curls. “*Tu padarei tai man taip sunku, mieloji. Nustokite manęs reikalauti palikti jus. Ateik pas mane.*” Will trembled and fell against Hannibal’s chest. “*Pabėk su manimi.*”

“I’m going to miss your voice,” Will whispered, rising onto his toes and pressing a kiss to Hannibal’s stupid smirk. “I’m going to miss you. All of you. Your stupid suits and those god awful paisley ties.” Another kiss. “Your aggravating politeness and all of your cooking.” Will’s arms wrapped around Hannibal’s neck as he kissed Hannibal again. “I’m going to miss your mind. No one else has ever understood me or made myself understand myself as much as you do.”

“*Prašau nustoti mane atstumti.*”

The words weren’t said in English because Hannibal couldn’t bear for the words to be said in a language that Will would understand. He had promised to respect Will’s wishes and he knew that he could convince Will to go with him. It would be the easiest thing Hannibal had ever done, but it was Will’s choice and Will was a steadfast being. He might say that his foundation was sand, but it was bedrock when Will wanted it to be bedrock. And right now it was a mix between the two, waiting for Hannibal’s move, but Hannibal wouldn’t do that to Will. Not anymore.

“I’ll always love you Hannibal.” Will’s voice was soft, airy.

“Silly boy,” Hannibal whispered, kissing Will deeply, holding onto the boy with fingers locked into his curls. Will moaned against Hannibal’s lips and pushed the man back and into the bed. Will straddled Hannibal's hips and pushed Hannibal's wrists above his head, pinning his hands into the bed.

Will's phone went off in his pocket and he ignored it, knowing exactly who it was and what the man would be wanting. All Will was wanting was Hannibal. If this was the last moment he had with Hannibal, then he was going to use it.

"Shouldn't you get that?" Hannibal gasped out when Will finally let the man catch his breath.

"Shut up, Hannibal," Will ordered firmly, kissing Hannibal again. "If I answer, then I'll have to leave and then I won't see you again."

"It's going to be suspicious if you don't answer."

"I don't care," Will growled, biting at Hannibal's bottom lip and causing Hannibal to shiver under him.

"Don't get reckless, Will," Hannibal warned, eyes closed tight as Will's bite split open one of the cuts on Hannibal's lips. He tried to find his voice as Will licked at the blood that was freely flowing from the penetrating pain. "You must always play the game, keep them in check."

"Hannibal," Will hissed, biting harshly and making Hannibal moan. "Shut up and give me your lips."

"Will-"

Will's hand moved to hold down both of Hannibal's wrists, his now free one clasping around Hannibal's bruised neck. He licked at the blood that had budded up from Hannibal's split lip as another call came in. He paid no mind to it though, just let the iciness from the open windows and the scent of cleaners and the taste of copper envelope him.

"Do not speak unless spoken to," Will instructed, watching Hannibal's eyes blow wide. Hannibal didn't fight him this time, going weak under Will as Will's grip around his neck tightened and pushed Hannibal down into the bed. "Are you more sadist or masochist?" Will asked curiously, teeth digging into Hannibal's jaw hard enough to add Will's own bruises to Hannibal's body and dragging a gasp from him, Will feeling the movement of the sound from Hannibal's chest to his lips.

"I believe sadomasochism is the term you are looking for," Hannibal answered softly, letting Will hold him there, chained to the bed. Hannibal could fight if he wanted to, he was stronger than the empath, but he couldn't seem to find the strength to fight back. Will made him weak, but it was the best feeling in the world. An openness that Hannibal had never experienced after his sister. A vulnerability that he had never allowed himself to feel. Something that only Will had ever been able to coax out of him. The same way that Hannibal had been the only person to seduce the darkness out of Will.

"Why do you look so damn good in everything you wear?" Will grumbled, eyes wandering over Hannibal's body as he sat up to look at the man.

"Language Will."

Will pressed a bit harder into Hannibal's throat and Hannibal's eyes shut tightly with a surprised attempt at an inhale of air.

"Do I need to repeat my rule, Dr. Lecter?" Will asked with a smirk, leaning down to Hannibal's ear. "If you're breaking this first one, what am I supposed to do with you if you break the others?"

"You have more in mind?" Hannibal got out in a small voice, eyes flickering over Will's face as Will sat back up again.

"If you don't stop talking then there's not going to be anymore," Will informed him, leaning down and kissing the blood from Hannibal's lips, hand leaving Hannibal's neck and tangling itself into silver locks.

The phone rang once more, buzzing in Will's pocket and against Hannibal's hip. Will frowned and pulled back, Hannibal giving him an expectant look.

"You need to answer it," Hannibal insisted carefully. "Like I said, you must always play the game." Will climbed from Hannibal and pulled his phone from his pocket, looking at the screen, jaw tight. "Will," Hannibal stated strongly as he sat up. Will's eyes left the still ringing phone and returned to Hannibal, face softening slightly. "Calm, collected."

Will answered the phone and put it to his ear. "Hi Jack. Sorry, I was on the other line. What do you need?" His voice was steady and composed, watching as Hannibal got to his feet and began helping Will clean while listening to Will's side of the conversation intently.

"What was wrong with the boy?" Jack asked, diving right into the test that Will knew had been coming.

"Nearly drowned," Will replied cautiously.

"Alana corroborated your story, Will," Jack stated matter-of-factly over the line, obviously accepting Will's answer. "Very kind of you to help her."

"I couldn't say no to an old friend, Jack. The same way you've wrapped me back up in all of this." Will watched as Hannibal emptied all of the garbage cans that they had used into the larger bag in hand. He then went to the table and found the roll of masking tape that Will had bought and pulled some free, wrapping it around his hand.

"Well, I need you, if you're willing. And you're already in the area."

Will gave a sigh. "Jack, I had a really bad day yesterday and didn't get hardly any sleep. I really don't want to-"

"You'll be here in an hour." It wasn't a question or a suggestion, it was a demand.

"I would need to get a rental car. I don't know if anywhere will be open with all of this snow," Will argued, really not wanting to explain all of his injuries that Jack was certainly going to notice the second that Will showed up.

"It's just snow," Jack pointed out. "We have it all winter long. They're used to it."

Will frowned, hand digging into his curls and messing them up as he watched Hannibal use the tape to lift the dog hair from where the blanket had been.

“No, Jack. I just want to go home.”

“What happened that was so bad yesterday?” Jack challenged.

“I got divorce papers on my birthday,” Will answered. “Molly is trying to take Walter from me.”

There was a small silence and a deep breath from Jack. “Happy birthday, right?”

“Yeah, best one I’ve ever had,” Will grumbled sarcastically. “Jack, I really need to be trying to find a lawyer before she talks to all of them. I don’t have time to come look at a crime scene. Please... I’ll take a look at the case files when we’re back in the office. I promise.”

“What happened to helping an old friend?”

“We are not playing this guilt game. Ask Alana to come look at the scene if you’re so desperate.”

“Will, her son nearly drowned. I’m not going to ask that of her.”

“And my son is less important than hers?” Will challenged, voice sharper than he meant it. He caught Hannibal’s dark look and closed his eyes, willing his anger to dissipate. “Jack, Walter is all that I have left.” Will gave a hopeless sigh. “He might not be in the ER, but he still needs me. I have to focus on him. Especially after the last Witch Hunter’s attack being so close to him. He needs me Jack.”

“You’ll look over the reports?”

Will agreed. Anything to get off the phone. Maybe he had afforded himself a few more hours with Hannibal and he would take anything and everything that Hannibal would give him. Soak Hannibal into his skin and his veins so that he would never forget the man again. Even if it made him ache and cold, he didn’t want to forget. Not ever again. And there were still so many blank spaces that needed to be filled that Will was afraid would never be filled if Hannibal left. “I promise.”

“How are you getting home?”

“I can get Margot to send me a driver or call a cab maybe. I’ll figure it out,” Will assured.

“I could come get-”

“No,” Will said quickly, too quickly, calling Hannibal’s attention to him. He scrambled for something else to say. “You’re just going to drag me to that scene anyway.”

Jack gave a small laugh. “Take care of yourself Will.”

“Talk to you later, Jack.” Will lowered his phone and shoved it into his pocket, letting go of a deep breath he hadn’t been aware he was holding. He fell back onto the bed, arms out, staring up at the ceiling. “Do you get tired of playing the game constantly? Aren’t you exhausted having to hold that face day in and day out?”

“I enjoy playing,” Hannibal explained, setting the garbage bag aside and looking over Will. “But I don’t always hold my face. You are often my escape from that face. The only person I let willingly in behind the mask.”

“Check out is in half an hour. We need to get going.” But Will didn’t move. He found himself wanting to stay right here in this perfect little bubble of fakeness. Because if they left, he knew it was one step closer to goodbye. If they left it was one step closer to never seeing Hannibal again. If they left this motel room, reality would come crashing in like a freight train, crumbling them apart and Will wasn’t sure if he could take it. Not when everything else was such hell. “Where are you going to go?”

He could hear Hannibal’s movement and evenly saw the man come into view, looking down at Will.

“Come with me and you’ll see.”

Will gave a small smile. “You’re not going to let me know, are you?”

“You might get your moral compass back Will. Where would I be then?”

Will snorted and rolled his eyes. “You have become my true north, Hannibal. My moral compass is very much broken in most aspects.”

Hannibal gave a small nod. “If I tell you, you’ll try to find me.”

“And you don’t want that?” Will questioned curiously, sitting up to better see Hannibal.

“You have made your position very clear, Will. I will not distract you from your goal.” Hannibal glanced around the room and sighed. “We just need to wipe everything down and I think we should be ok to leave.”

The work continued on in silence, each and every surface wiped clean of any possible prints and then trash bags and shopping were taken out to Will’s car, keys returned to the clerk, the same boy as before who Will gave another generous tip to with whatever he had left in his wallet, and they started off.

The car was uncomfortably quiet, but neither man dared interrupt the silence in case it would upset the other. Both too afraid of doing something wrong in this fragile moment. Will found himself wondering over every possible option for what the rest of the day held and each one made him ache with the want to run away, his heart pounding painfully in his chest while a tug in his ribs told him he needed to stay in place.

So he shut it off. All of it was off. No feelings, no thoughts other than pushing Hannibal as far away as he could. The best thing he could do would be to rip off the band aid and just get it over with. He couldn’t spend another night pretending he was fine and live the lie. He just couldn’t.

In his numbness, Will found himself pulling up in front of his house, parking in the driveway next to the spare car that Will would use when his broke down. He couldn’t bring himself to sell the piece of junk and enjoyed working on it like he did boat motors. They were problems easily solvable without a person’s emotions needing to be involved.

Will got from the car, basically slamming the car door and heading up to the porch steps without waiting for Hannibal. Cold and distant was safe. It had always kept him safe. Cold and distant was his protection and he would wear it like a shield.

“Will,” Hannibal called, following Will up the front steps while Will worked on unlocking the door. With it open, Will stepped in and pulled the extra set of car keys from the hook on the wall. “Will-”

“Here,” Will said, holding out the keys to Hannibal who stopped abruptly when Will didn’t let him into the house. Hannibal’s eyebrows furrowed and he slowly took the outheld set of keys. “I’ll give you a good two days before I report the car stolen. You should be able to get far in that time.”

“Will-”

“Please go, Hannibal.” Will placed a fake smile on his lips and gave him a small nod. “Stay safe, will you?” Will attempted to close the door, but Hannibal’s hand shot out, stopping Will’s attempts at separating them.

With a knowing sigh, Will let Hannibal in. Hannibal wasn’t going to leave until he said his piece. Will closed the door and could hear the keys being tossed aside. In a flurry, he was turned around and strong hands at his hips shoved him violently up against the front door.

Hannibal’s lips were hot as he kissed Will, possessively trapping the empath against the door. Will couldn’t hold back the groan that came from his throat as his hands clutched at Hannibal’s arms in hopes of some mental purchase as a fog blanketed his mind.

“If you lie to me again,” Hannibal said aggressively between his assaults to Will’s lips, “I will kill you.” Will shivered at the threat, entirely sure that Hannibal meant it, but not finding any reason to be worried about it.

“Wanting to prot-protect myself is lying?” Will questioned, head spinning and barely able to make sense of the words that were coming from him as his hands pulled Hannibal as close as he could.

“You know it is,” Hannibal accused, moving his assaults to Will’s neck and not being gentle about it in the slightest. Will’s head tipped back against the door, a sigh leaving his lips as Hannibal’s teeth dug harshly into his skin. “Tell me the truth, Will.” Will shook his head, licking at his swollen lips. He winced at a purposely hard bite just below his jaw line, Will’s unwillingness to answer obviously upsetting the spoiled killer who always got everything he wanted. The mark would be indelible, made with blood like a permanent ink in Will’s skin.

“I don’t want you to leave,” Will blurted out, fingers trembling in their clasp of Hannibal’s cold leather jacket. “Stay with me.”

“Stay?” Hannibal questioned before biting at Will’s ear. Will’s breath hitched sharply, his knees going weak, Hannibal holding his weight up.

“I’ll hide you. Protect you,” Will choked, throat tight.

“*Tu tokia viliojanti, mylėk,*” Hannibal whispered in Will’s ear, enjoying the way Will’s legs nearly gave out. “Stop tempting me with false promises, Will. Those are still lies.”

Will shook his head, hands moving to take Hannibal’s face and pull him back for a heady kiss. “No lies,” he whispered, breathless as he kissed Hannibal again, needy. “Never lies.” Will’s eyes rolled back at a bite at his lip, Hannibal’s tongue invading his mouth. Will’s hands fisted into Hannibal’s hair, pulling at the man until Hannibal broke their kiss and Will could gasp for air, chest heaving. “Let me take care of you.” Will’s eyes flickered over Hannibal’s face, trying to read the emotion below the lust on his features and either Hannibal was hiding it well or Will's mind was too far gone that he couldn't push through the hunger. "Stay, Hannibal. Please."

Hannibal did his best to push away the odd pain in his heart at Will's begging. And it was begging, like he was asking for his life to be spared. Hannibal was so familiar with the pleads for life that were silenced with drugs or a knife or a snap of the neck and it unsettled him that Will would use the same voice. But he couldn't stay.

They both knew this and he was only making this worse. Hannibal knew he was the reason everything was as bad as it was. He should have just jumped off that cliff at the lighthouse when Will was stable enough to be found without too many odd questions. It would have saved Will so much heartache, especially if Hannibal was gone from his mind. What Hannibal wouldn't do to be gone from Will's head right now.

Anything to give Will peace of mind, even if it meant erasing Hannibal completely. Maybe that would be better for Will. Maybe Hannibal shouldn't have begged the universe for Will to remember, because even if it killed Hannibal slowly, Will forgetting was saving him from Hannibal. And Will needed to be saved, especially if Hannibal gave in to Will's desires.

He could stay. It would be difficult, but they could work it out. They had been on the run for three months before and were only found because Hannibal let them be found. Or he could break his promise of letting any of this be Will's choice and just take him away. It would be so painfully easy. He would just have to guide Will out to the car and Will would leave with him, divorce papers and son be damned.

Hannibal couldn't bring himself to answer, because he knew that the words that came from his mouth would only make this more complicated and he hoped that Will would stop asking Hannibal to stay, because he would. Anything was Will's if he asked. And he had asked, but... There needed to be more. Hannibal needed to know that Will wouldn't regret it if Hannibal stayed, because Will would regret it. Hannibal was only good for dragging Will down and he didn't want to be that for Will anymore.

Hannibal's hands pulled at Will's jacket, kissing Will so he wouldn't have to speak. The heavy winter coat was tossed to the floor and long artistic fingers began to pull at the buttons on Will's plaid shirt. Will let the fabric be pulled from his body and tossed on the floor to join the coat. He shivered as his bare back was shoved back up against the cold wood of the front door.

"Do you still have rules for me to play by?" Hannibal questioned, fingers trailing over Will's bare skin and causing Will to bite his lips at how freezing the combination of the door and Hannibal's feather like touches were making him. Will shook his head, all fight gone from him. "Shame," Hannibal tutted, licking at the dip in Will's collarbone. "I do enjoy you being aggressive."

"Just use me Hannibal," Will ordered, voice more solid than he thought it would be. "I want to remember you."

Hannibal growled, something low in his throat and kissed Will fiercely, until Will's mind was nothing but the dizzying scent and taste of Hannibal. "I won't be gentle this time."

Will moaned, a blush highlighting his cheeks beautifully. "That was real, then?"

"You remember?" Hannibal asked in pure curiosity, pausing in his attack on Will's body and meeting the empath's eyes.

"You told me to forget everything that wasn't you and your love," Will answered softly, hands caressing Hannibal's cheeks. Hannibal gave a small nod, waiting for more. "I had a dream about it and had to take care of myself when I woke up. I blame you." Hannibal gave a small smile and kissed Will again, a little softer now. "Don't be kind to me Hannibal," Will demanded when the kiss broke. "Don't be gentle. Use me up until I'm nothing."

Hannibal's strong hands lifted Will up and Will wrapped his legs around Hannibal's middle, kissing Hannibal intently, arms wrapped around Hannibal's neck as Hannibal stepped away from the door, fingers now hot against Will's icy bare back. Before Will could pull his mind free enough to find where Hannibal had moved them, Will's back was rested onto the couch, Hannibal's weight swiftly pressing Will into the cushions as hands pulled at the button and zipper of his jeans.

Will's hands slipped under Hannibal's jacket, pushing the fabric from Hannibal's shoulders until Hannibal gave in and pulled the jacket off and then his shirt as Will's eager fingers slipped under it.

Will's fingers explored that man's body as if it were the first time he had ever felt Hannibal and it might as well have been. Will found Hannibal's decently defined V-line, trailing it on both sides with careful touches when Hannibal stiffened with a shiver. Will bit at his bottom lip, holding back a smile as Hannibal reached between them to stop his hands.

"Did you not like that?" Will teased, voice airy. "Or did you like that too much?"

Hannibal didn't answer, just captured Will's lips back in a kiss, causing Will to smile. Hannibal's hands finished their work of Will's clothes and tossed them to the floor, scattered like the rest of Will's items.

Will broke the kiss is a moan as jean clad hips dipped against his bare hips, the fabric rough but not an unwelcome friction.

"I want you on your knees for me," Hannibal hissed in Will's ear before licking at it. Will shivered with a small nod. "Where do you keep your lube, *mielasis*?"

"Bedside table, upstairs," Will answered, giving a whimper of dislike when Hannibal took his weight away and the cold set in. "On my knees?"

"On your knees," Hannibal enforced with a nod before leaving the room for the stairs.

Will stared up at the ceiling for a moment, letting the cold air wash over his body and bring his mind back from its haze. What was he doing? Exactly what he wanted to do, was the answer, but it wasn't right. What did he care? Everything was being taken from him anyways. He might as well enjoy what little he had while he still had it, right?

With slow movements, Will obeyed Hannibal's instructions, moving onto his wide spread knees, ass in the air, and resting his head against his arms, taking up the full length of the love seat and waiting in silence for Hannibal to return. Will did his best to keep his breathing steady as a million thoughts flooded through his system.

He was so vulnerable like this. And the front door wasn't locked. He seemed to remember the window possibly being open. But it was unlikely that anyone would come by his home. It was in the middle of nowhere. No one would be coming to his door. No one would be looking into the window. But that didn't stop the way his heart trembled in his chest at the idea of being seen, though he wasn't sure if he was opposed to the idea entirely.

Footsteps on the stairs saved Will from his thoughts, but they didn't stop the blush he could feel spread down his back as the footsteps came to a stop, still far away, and he could feel those maroon eyes burning his skin as they took him in.

"Hannibal," Will grumbled after another long few moments that each felt like an hour. "Please."

"Please what?" Hannibal's voice asked from the stairs and Will didn't dare look up to confirm the smirk he heard in Hannibal's tone.

"The anticipation is worse than anything you could possibly be doing to me. Please, touch me or something," Will replied with a dry mouth and a tongue that darted out to try to wet his lips.

There was a chuckle and Hannibal's presence grew closer. A warm hand rested against Will's back, and pushed his shoulders further down so Will's chest was pressing into the couch, before an index finger trailed along Will's spine, making Will shiver violently.

"*Taip noriai gražu.*" Hannibal stated in amusement as he looked over the man before him, standing on the other side of the arm rest. If Hannibal were being honest he had taken in time upstairs to see if Will would do what he asked or if Will would snap to his senses. Will could be strung along as long as the focus on him was constant. When the focus was broken, Will was allowed to return to his own head space and often took his own path.

A kiss was placed to the small of Will's back and he shut his eyes tightly. Will bit his lips to stay quiet as Hannibal's teeth scraped against the back of his hips and lower, leaving dark purple bruises over Will's milky pale skin. Will's eyes scrunched up at a painful twitch in his cock at the assaults to his thighs, but nowhere near what he needed.

"Will," Hannibal warned with lips pressed to the back of Will's thighs as Will shifted slightly. "If you move again, I will stop."

"Bastard," Will hissed through his teeth, trying to still his begging body.

His knees were beginning to shake from the position he was holding, but Hannibal didn't do anything to help relieve him. Instead, Hannibal leaned over Will's body and bit into Will's shoulder so hard that Will winced with a sharp inhale, but he didn't dare move.

"Language, Will." Hannibal's breath was hot against Will's skin as a tongue licked at and soothed the bite that had been harsh enough to draw blood. "Behave." Hannibal kept a firm hand between Will's shoulder blades, holding him to the couch as he removed himself from Will and began his agonizingly slow assaults again.

"H-Hannibal," Will stuttered out, arms aching along with his knees under his own weight from the forced angle that Hannibal's strong hand was keeping him in, especially the bullet wound that was still wrapped up. The next words were stolen from Will's mouth by a gasp as a hot stripe was licked up Will's center. Will bit into his arm with a heaving breath as Hannibal's tongue began to work at his entrance. God, it was filthy how much Will was enjoying this. He shouldn't be. Hannibal's tongue was wicked, dirty and it felt so mind numbingly good that Will nearly forgot the spasms in his elbows and knees. "Fuck."

A heat was pooling in his gut and there was a throbbing between his legs as he was continually ignored. He wanted to form words, tell Hannibal what he needed, but the words didn't come. They swirled around his mind and faded away into the fog of pleasure that was beginning to numb at his muscles and make him weak. He could taste copper on his lips as his teeth continued to dig into his arm of their own accord.

Just when he thought he would collapse, Hannibal pulled back with an amused hum that made Will's body quiver. "*Tu tokia graži*," Hannibal muttered, a smile pulling at his lips as Will's leg muscles fluttered. "Have I tortured you long enough?" Will could only think to nod his head. "Your head does not contain marbles, Will. I cannot hear you nod."

Will groaned, unlocking his teeth from his flesh. "Yes." It was nearly a cry from his throat. A sound he didn't know he could make and it made Hannibal chuckle lowly. Will wanted to turn around and hit Hannibal for breaking him down, turning him into a mess who couldn't speak, but he knew better. Knew if he wanted more he needed to obey, be Hannibal's good little puppet. "Please Hannibal."

"Please what, Will?"

Hannibal's hand slipped up to Will's neck and Will let himself be pressed somehow even further into the couch, but Hannibal didn't do much more than trap him there, making sure that Will couldn't move.

"Fuck me."

Will could sense the smile from Hannibal. "That's a little vulgar, Will, darling." The pressure on the back of Will's neck strengthened, just barely beginning to cut off Will's air.

Will growled, the knot in his gut begging for attention. "Hannibal, I will kill you."

"I'm afraid I respond better to be begged than threatened, though I do find it amusing."

Will's teeth clenched, voice tight. "Hannibal, please." Hannibal was silent and after a moment, Will gave a sigh, relaxing into Hannibal's hold against his neck. "Please, Hannibal. Please." It wasn't harsh or forced, it was a soft plea. Surrender. "Take care of me, Hannibal."

"*Viskas, ką jums reikia padaryti, paprašykite, mylėkite,*" Hannibal's gentle whisper said somewhere behind him and Will could hear the cap of the lube pop open.

A coldness dripped over Will's entrance and he sighed as Hannibal's fingers slowly worked into him, stretching him further open, touching places in him that he was trying to store away in his memory. He didn't want to forget this feeling. Not again. He never wanted to lose a part of Hannibal ever again. He didn't want to relive it in a dream, because subconscious Will did not give justice to this moment.

Hannibal's fingers pressed into the bundle of nerves in Will as if his fingers knew naturally where to go and Will felt his knees tremble with want of giving out. Will wasn't sure how much more he could take. His erection pulsed painfully between his legs, but he didn't dare move. He could beg, though. Hannibal had made himself quite clear in that aspect.

"Hannibal," Will gasped out through the moans that Hannibal was pulling from him with those god damn fingers. "Can I-"

“Absolutely not,” Hannibal answered with a slightly harder thrust that made Will buck his hips with a stifled cry into his arms. “If you move, I will stop.” Will whimpered out his complaint, but stayed completely still. Hannibal slipped his fingers free and adjusted himself onto his knees, his grip on Will’s neck only more obtainable now. “Are you still wanting to be used, Will?”

Will gave a nod, face still hidden in his arms, fists clutching at the fabric in the couch cushion. “Don’t be gentle. I want to be fucked, not loved.”

Hannibal’s eyes flickered over the dainty line of Will’s spine, his shoulders and vertebrae were a gnarly ladder of knobs and bone blades from thin stretched skin from not eating. Hannibal took in the words and tried to make sure he fully understood them before giving Will what he wanted. Because this was still for Will. It would always be for Will. Even if Hannibal was cruel and denied Will instant gratification, it was for Will. Will could demand and take and Hannibal would let the boy.

Hannibal rose from the couch, releasing his hold on Will’s neck and listening as the boy inhaled deeply, but still stayed in position. Hannibal unbuttoned his jeans and pulled them off with his boxers, eyes still firmly on Will whose body reacted to each sense naturally. Hannibal moved back to the couch one knee up on the armrest, behind Will once more, the knee beginning to ache a bit at the pressure placed on it, a familiarity to the first time they had done this.

Hannibal smiled at the thought as he added lube to his own length before taking a hold of Will’s hips and angling Will a little better. Hannibal pushed in and watched as Will’s shoulders tensed up with a sharp hiss of air. Hannibal stopped and reached out a hand, rubbing between Will’s shoulder blades to try to calm the reaction.

“Don’t stop,” Will choked out through the lump in his throat as his eyes brimmed with tears at the pleasant burn. He could sense Hannibal’s caution at how broken Will’s voice was and Will swallowed, trying to make his voice stronger. “Please, Hannibal.”

That seemed to be enough for Hannibal because he continued to press into Will whose breath was stolen away as Hannibal filled him completely and he fought at the urge to reach back to clutch at Hannibal. Instead he bit back into his arm, nails scraping at the fabric beneath them noisily.

The first few thrusts were an easy rocking motion that made Will tremble and breathe through his teeth and against his arms as he got used to the feeling making his gut clench painfully tight.

“*Kaip tu jautiesi?"*

“M-more,” Will stuttered through his teeth, almost certain he knew what Hannibal was asking him.

“*Visada toks godus.*”

There was a sharp snap of hips and a noise jumped form Will that he didn’t allow, something that clawed from his throat as a new and brutal pace was set. Hannibal drove into Will, stealing sounds that Will had never made before. His forearms were weak as his elbows braced him against Hannibal.

Fingers tangled into Will’s sweat damp curls and he was hauled up onto his hands, the new position welcome, letting a burn set into Will’s elbows as they straightened out, but still tried to bear his weight. Blood trickled from the bite in his shoulder, down his chest and from his arm, coating his hand.

Will couldn't bring himself to mind as Hannibal's teeth marked at his skin, bloodying any flesh that presented itself so carelessly close to his mouth. Hannibal's tongue was swift to lick at any of the jagged circles, lapping at Will's blood like it was the finest of wines.

"Hannibal." Will's breath hitched at a harsh bite that made Will shake. "Please touch me. I-I can't-I can't-"

"You can," Hannibal insisted into Will's sweat glistening neck. "And you will. Just like this, or not at all." Will desperately shook his head, tears in his eyes. "*Tu priklausai man. Padarysi, kaip aš noriu. Amžinai ir visada.*"

Hannibal's fist pulled at Will's damp curls until Will was pressed back against Hannibal's chest, smearing vivid crimson over Hannibal. One hand stayed tight in Will's hair to keep him in place, the other wrapped around Will's waist for support. The sounds that ripped from Will's lips, no longer smothered behind arms, nearly made Hannibal's legs weak. Will's arms curled back behind Hannibal's head and dug into Hannibal's hair, anchoring Will in tangles of silver.

Will's head tipped back to look at Hannibal who licked into Will's kiss swollen, bruised lips, tugging at Will's hair, Will's tongue hot against his as they kissed. There was a shutter and Will broke the kiss with a loud gasp as he came untouched, body immediately going weak.

Will's head fell back onto Hannibal's shoulder, lax and dizzy from pleasure, over sensitive and love drunk. Will winced as Hannibal's teeth caught at the crook of his exposed neck, biting down tightly as he pushed into Will a few more times. His prey, his willing victim, his love. Blood dripped down Will's flushed skin, sweat making the red spider web across his heaving chest.

There was a low growl as Hannibal came, primal and hungry, teeth sinking deeper into Will's flesh. Will groaned in protest at the bright pain, but Hannibal quickly soothed at the marking with a smoldering tongue.

"*Taip gerai, mano meile*," Hannibal got out through labored breathing. "*Tu visada toks geras.*" He kissed softly at Will's neck, releasing his overbearing grip in the empath's hair. Will flinched as the curls went free, a warm pain coming to his scalp as his hair settled back where it belonged. "*Gražus berniukas. Toks gražus berniukas.*"

Will licked at his lips as the aches and pains began to set into his muscles and bones, now more than aware of how slick his back was with not just sweat. "Shower?"

"Bath," Hannibal insisted in Will's ear. "Let me take care of you, silly boy. *Kiekviena paskutinė jūsų dalis.*

Tu padarei tai man taip sunku, mieloji. Nustokite manęs reikalauti palikti jus. Ateik pas mane: You made it so hard for me, darling. Stop demanding me to leave you. Come to me.

Pabėk su manimi: Run with me.

Prašau nustoti mane atstumti: Please stop rejecting me.

Tu tokia viliojanti, mylėk: You are so seductive, love.

mielasis: darling

Taip noriai gražu: So willingly beautiful

Tu tokia graži: You are so beautiful.

Viskas, ką jums reikia padaryti, paprašykite, mylėkite: All you need to do is ask, love.

Kaip tu jautiesi?: How are you feeling?

Visada toks godus: Always so greedy

Tu priklausai man. Padarysi, kaip aš noriu. Amžinai ir visada: You belong to Me. You will do as I wish. Forever and always.

Taip gerai, mano meile. Tu visada toks geras. Gražus berniukas. Toks gražus berniukas: So good, my love. You are always so good. Beautiful boy. Such a beautiful boy.

Kiekviena paskutinė jūsų dalis: Every last part of you.

Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

“Cause of death,” Price announced as Will was led into the lab. “Hitting the ground obviously. Though he does have an interesting nick in his neck that I think I was able to place back to a-” Price turned around, his smile falling slightly at the sight of Will, thinking it was going to be only Jack, but his smile quickly brightened. “We missed you the other night.”

“I’m sorry I wasn’t present for a ménage à trois,” Will shot back, causing Zeller to snort

Chapter Notes

Sorry it's a late update. Been crazy lately with work and lost track of time. Hope you enjoy it!

Losing You Terrifies Me

Hannibal drew the bath for Will, finding some bath salts in the cabinet. The room quickly began to fill with the scent of lavender and rose as the clawfoot tub filled. Hannibal wiped himself down, removing any trace of blood from his skin and pulled on his boxers that he had snatched from the living room.

He went for the stairs and found Will still laying sprawled on the couch, blood pooling between his shoulders and at the small of his back, his body painted in blooming bruises. Hannibal lowered himself to his knees beside Will's face, Will's eyes closed and his breathing deep and steady. Hannibal gave a small half smile and brushed his fingers through Will's hair, pulling Will from the edge of sleep with a deep inhale and fluttering eyelids.

“We need to get you cleaned up,” Hannibal said softly, letting Will pull himself naturally from sleep's grasp as his fingers continued to pass through still damp curls. “Come with me.”

Will let himself be pulled from the couch and led up the stairs to the bathroom. Hannibal helped lower Will into the tub and Will winced as he relaxed into the warmth of the water. Will hissed as his back touched the side of the tub and Hannibal's fingers were quick to tangle into his curls, a gentle open mouthed kiss to his neck, making him shiver.

“Next time warn me if I'm being too rough with you,” Hannibal whispered in Will's ear, the hint of true concern in his voice.

“It felt good,” Will assured breathlessly as Hannibal continued to kiss at his neck until Will was rested up against the back of the tub with his eyes closed. “I told you not to be gentle with me.”

“I can be much worse than a few bites,” Hannibal warned, a hand reaching down into the water and bringing up handfuls to wet down Will's curls.

Will smiled. “A *few* bites?” he asked, leaning into Hannibal's fingers as they began to work shampoo into his curls. “More than a few.”

“I may have gotten carried away,” Hannibal agreed softly. “Would you like me to make you dinner?”

Will hummed lightly. “Yes.”

“Anything you would like to have?”

“Gumbo?” Will asked curiously, waiting to see what Hannibal's reaction would be to the odd and not very fancy dish. He hadn't had the dish since he was a child. He could remember his father making it every now and then, certain that it was more a mashup of odds and ends into a soup because there wasn't anything else in the house, but he had always enjoyed the spice and warmth of the dish.

“If your kitchen provides, then of course.” Hannibal pulled his hands from Will's hair and washed them off in the water. “Rinse out your hair, Will.”

Will took a deep breath and sunk beneath the surface of the water, letting the calmness entomb him.

"*LLa tua loquela ti fa manifesto,*" Hannibal read aloud, book in his lap, free hand gently playing with Will's curls as Will leaned against him, eating the dinner Hannibal had made from a bowl, "*di quella nobil patria natio a la qual forse fui troppo molesto*-"

"I remember this," Will whispered, lowering his spoon back unto his gumbo with a thoughtful look. Hannibal glanced up from the book, finger marking his place.

"What do you remember, Will?"

"A fire," Will said softly, hand motioning to where the tv was. "A big crackling fire. And wine. There always seemed to be wine." His eyebrows furrowed as he sat up and Hannibal released his hold of Will's curls. Will placed his food aside on the coffee table and rose to his feet, eyes looking over the wall as if there was something else there. "And then there were these windows. Giant windows. It was snowing and you could hear the river from the deck."

He turned back to Hannibal as if looking for some form of approval or acknowledgment that he was right. Hannibal gave a small nod. Will put a hand to his head, pain flickering across his features.

"You bought me Izzy." Will gave a small laugh. "No wonder she hates Molly. She's not you." Hannibal gave a small smile, a sense of accomplishment filling him. "And we would cook in this giant kitchen. You would read to me every night. Read this same book. You would play the piano." Will looked towards where the piano would have been if they were back in the cabin.

"That's right," Hannibal said in a quiet voice.

"I wish I could remember you teaching me. I just know how to play that Claire De Lune song. I have no idea how I know it, but you're the only possible answer." Will gave a sigh, eyes still flickering around distantly. "You'll have to teach me more. I would like to learn more."

"I would be happy to."

Will wandered back over to the couch, pulling the book from Hannibal's hand and placing it on the coffee table before straddling Hannibal's thighs, arms around Hannibal's neck. Will rested his forehead against Hannibal's and closed his eyes, letting Hannibal's hands take his waist.

"I keep saying that you need to do things for me when I know you're leaving," Will whispered, nuzzling at Hannibal's nose with his own. "But I can't stop picturing this future with you. This future of just us with all of the time in the universe to do whatever we could possibly want. You could show me the world and teach me the piano and cook for me and..." Will trailed off, biting at his bottom lip. "I'm being selfish. I just keep expecting things from you. What do you want from me?"

"In another world?" Hannibal asked, causing Will's gut to twist into knots. Will gave a small nod. "You by my side."

Will sat back a bit when Hannibal didn't say anything else. "That's all?"

"You're the only thing I need to be happy," Hannibal assured, a hand reaching up and caressing Will's face.

"God, you read too many classics," Will teased with a small huff of laughter. "You're such a hopeless romantic."

"So I've been told."

Will leaned forward and placed a quick kiss against Hannibal's lips, smiling as Hannibal followed him when he pulled away. "Can this be our other world?"

"Will," Hannibal warned, though he was quickly silenced with a kiss.

"Please don't stop lying to me," Will stated softly. "Keep me in this dream a little longer."

"This can be our world," Hannibal said, surrendering to Will's wants.

Will's smile was bright and he gave Hannibal another kiss. "Stay with me one more night. You can leave after I fall asleep. Just-just stay with me until then. Please."

"Will-"

"Please."

Hannibal gave a sigh, fingers pushing back Will's unruly curls that needed a trim. "Anything you ask, my love."

"The moon?"

"Immediately."

Will's smile was warm, but Hannibal watched it slowly fall as his attention was drawn outside by a car motor. "Molly?" Will asked, stunned as he watched through the window, the one he knew had been open, as Molly climbed from her car. "Go upstairs," Will muttered to Hannibal, climbing from the killer's lap. "Please."

Hannibal rose from the couch and watched as Will went to scoop up his glass of whiskey and put it in the kitchen.

"I'll come get you when she leaves," Will continued, coming back to the living room to try to clean it, remove any trace of Hannibal from it.

Hannibal obeyed and hit the top stair as the door was opened. He could make out the shuffling of keys and the jingling of dog collars. He sat on the top step, well hidden from view and listened closely.

Will glanced up from the wine glass he had been trying to dispose of as Molly entered the room, both Winston and Izzy in tow.

"What are you doing here, Molly?" he asked, voice sounding more frazzled than he meant it.

"Still drinking wine over your whiskey?" Molly deflected as she pushed hair behind her ear.

"When the mood suits," Will answered back, looking down at the half finished glass. "It was a wine kind of day." Will took the glass to the kitchen and placed it on the counter. "How's Walter?" Will needed something for his hands to do, so dishes were the next step. He turned on the water, hand under the stream, waiting for it to warm up and could hear Molly step further into the house.

“I thought you would want your dogs back.”

“My dogs?” Will questioned, pausing in the washing of Hannibal’s bowl from dinner.

“Smells good in here,” Molly commented, going to the stove where the pot of gumbo still sat. She glanced into it and gave an impressed look. “You’re getting better.”

“My dogs?” Will asked again, turning to face his wife who was stirring at the soup on the stove curiously. “We’re separating the dogs?”

“Izzy still doesn’t like me and Winston can’t be without her. They would be happier here with you.”

“And the others?” Will turned off the sink, unable to find the drive to continue the dishes even if now his hands were fidgeting.

“They’re all being adopted.”

“You’re not keeping any of them?”

Molly sighed and dropped to her knees, unhooking the leash from both of their collars. Winston came over to Will, who rubbed at his head absently. Izzy, on the other hand, raced for the stairs and Will frowned, hoping that Molly wouldn’t think anything of it.

“I don’t have time to take care of them now that I’m back to working full time and Walter is busy with his schooling,” Molly explained, standing and placing the leashes on the kitchen counter. “Will, we need to talk about-”

“I’m not talking about the terms on your papers,” Will stated firmly with a frown. “You sent them to me on my birthday of all things.”

“I didn’t know they were going to deliver them on your-”

“And then you don’t want me anywhere around my son?” Will continued .

“My son,” Molly said once more, like a broken record.

“My son too, Molly,” Will stated strongly, a hand going to his chest. “I adopted him. I have every right to see my son. I’ve just been trying to give you the space you need.”

Molly’s face seemed to soften, as if this was the first real moment she had taken in Will since she had entered their home. She stepped closer and reached out to him. Will caught her wrist and pushed her hand away.

“Did you get shot?” she asked, causing Will to look down at his bandaged arm. He gave a shrug. “And what happened to your neck?”

“He was a biter,” Will muttered, pulling at his shirt collar to try to cover the bruising around the bite marks there, the same bite marks that went all the way down his back and bruises over his thighs. “I’m fine.”

“Was this for a case?”

“And if it was?” Will challenged, causing Winston to whine. “Molly, I don’t think you have a say over what I do with my life anymore.”

“I suppose not, but I would hope that if you are serious about fighting for Walter you will at least try to prove you’re not going to get killed or get him killed.” Molly sighed, a hand to her head. “I still care about you Will. I just can’t be in a relationship with you anymore.”

“That’s rich,” Will grumbled, moving from the kitchen and back to the living room, past Molly. Winston stayed by his side as he sat back down on the couch and picked up his bowl of food that had gone cold by now and The Divine Comedy. “You brought the dogs over. Thank you.” Will did his best to make sure his voice was gentle, actually grateful, because he was. “I’ve missed them.”

“You’re welcome,” Molly muttered, coming over to the couch. “Why is Izzy upstairs?”

Will shrugged. “I’m sure I will find out when you leave. A bit rude for me to up and leave.”

“Was someone else here Will?”

Will glanced over his shoulder with a frown. “No,” he answered solidly. “Why on earth would anyone else be here? You know I don’t have any friends.”

“The FBI seems to be very friendly with you,” Molly pointed out with a shrug, folding her arms over her chest.

“I would not let Jack Crawford into this house. He would taint it.” The word was said tightly and Molly frowned, taking in the hidden meaning behind the word that Will was throwing at her.

“You had a bowl in the sink that had the soup in it. And now you have this bowl,” Molly pointed out. She wasn’t stupid. She had picked up on observing small details not only from being a mother, but also from being around Will. “I just assumed-”

“That I possibly had something to eat earlier, thought I wouldn’t want anymore, put the bowl in the sink and then later wanted more?” Will provided for her.

Molly gave a small sigh and a defeated nod. “Sure.”

“Thank you for bringing the dogs by Molly.” Will rose to his feet, discarding his things and hoping it would tell Molly it was time for her to leave. She must have understood because she straightened up a bit and pulled her keys from her pocket. She turned and Will followed her to the door, Winston trailing behind him dutifully. “Tell Walter I love him, will you?” Will said as he opened up the front door. Molly gave a small nod, though Will didn’t think she actually would reach out to her son on Will’s behalf.

“They’ve already been fed and taken out for the night. Goodnight Will,” Molly said as she stepped out into the cold.

“Night Molly.” Will closed and locked the door and knelt down, scratching at Winston’s head with a deep sigh. “Go to your bed,” Will instructed and Winston quickly obeyed, heading over to where several of the dog beds had been left and laying down on one for the night.

Will finished picking up the rest of the house and doing the dishes until everything was spotless, book in hand and then went for the stairs. He stopped when he neared the top, finding Hannibal sitting at the very top with Izzy’s head in his lap as he stroked the dog’s ears.

“Did you hear all of that?” Will questioned sheepishly, a hand going to his curls.

“Not if you didn’t want me to,” Hannibal replied politely.

“Ssk.” Izzy’s head shot up at the sound and Will pointed down the stairs. Izzy jumped to her feet and Will patted her head as she passed and disappeared for the night. “Can you keep reading to me?

It’s... comforting,” Will landed on.

“Of course.” Hannibal rose to his feet, doing his best to brush the dog hair from the clothes he had yet again borrowed from Will. Will gave a small smile as his eyes drifted over Hannibal’s body and Hannibal must have caught it. “What?” he questioned.

“I like seeing you in my clothes,” Will replied with a single shoulder shrug, heading up the rest of the stairs and passing the book over to Hannibal. Will pushed open his bedroom door and looked over the lonely bed. A bed that he had been sleeping in alone on nights where he wasn’t rushing to Alana’s for even the smallest chance to speak to Hannibal. A bed that would be full tonight, but empty in the morning. Will went over to the bed and sat on the side of it, rubbing at his tired eyes.

“What happened to it?” came Hannibal’s voice from somewhere over by Will’s dresser. Will opened his eyes to find Hannibal carefully studying the box of lures next to the black notebook that Will had yet to read through and it finally snapped into place. Will still found himself asking even though he knew the answer.

“That was from you, wasn’t it?” Will shook out his curls as Hannibal gave him a nod. “It was knocked onto the floor. I haven’t had a chance to fix it yet. Everything kind of got away from me. All of the lures are perfectly safe.”

Hannibal turned away from the box and went to the other side from Will, flicking on a single bedside lamp to better see, the only light having been from the moon through the window. A warm soft glow cast over the room, lulling Will into a false sense of home that he was more than happy to accept.

Will rested himself against Hannibal’s chest when Hannibal was finally situated, and closed his eyes at the steady rhythm of Hannibal’s heart beating. He could hear the book opening and the shuffle of pages turning as a tiredness pulled at his limbs and deeply into Hannibal’s body. Long artistic fingers drew delicate designs over his bare arm as a voice began to read, having found where they had left off.

“*Subitamente questo suono uscio d'una de l'arche; pero` m'accostai, temendo, un poco piu` al duca mio.*”

The boy was quickly asleep and Hannibal closed the book, setting it aside on the bedside table.

He could stay the night. He wanted to stay the night. God, did he want to stay. Stay with this curly haired deity until the end of days. But they both knew this wasn't another world. They both knew exactly what tonight meant for both of them.

Hannibal carefully slid out from under Will, resting the sleeping boy into the pillows, Will obviously spent so much so that he stayed asleep. Hannibal placed a kiss to Will's head and left the room, flicking off the lamp as he went.

Hannibal found his clothes in the bathroom where he had left them, folded on the counter. He changed and folded Will's clothes, leaving them in the same spot before heading for the stairs.

He stepped down the stairs and when he hit the floor, both dogs looked up from their beds, Izzy rising to her feet and watching Hannibal with a curious tip of her head.

Hannibal went to the door, finding his coat and boots, pulling both on then finding the car keys that Will had given him earlier that day that he tossed away carelessly.

With a deep breath and one final look at the house, both dogs looked at him, both in the entryway.

Hannibal opened the front door, a chill going through him at the winter wind that was blowing and he stepped from the house, locking the door behind him before heading over to the car that Will had given him to use.

Hannibal climbed in and sighed, looking over the car and turning it on. He closed his eyes and rested back in the seat, licking his lips.

He needed to leave. He knew he needed to leave. He also knew that his chest would never stop aching if he left. He knew this was a fine line, a very dangerous line that he was walking, but he couldn't bring himself to care.

Hannibal's fist hit the steering wheel and he opened his eyes, turning on the headlights and putting the car in reverse and pulling from the driveway. He absolutely needed to leave.

* * *

Will groaned as his alarm went off, rolling over to turn it off. He laid back on his back with a wince at the teeth marks that had been left behind, the only reminder that yesterday hadn’t been a dream, hands rubbing at his eyes. He sighed and covered his eyes with his arm, his free hand reaching out beside him in hopes of finding a body and finding nothing.

His chest gave a painful twinge and he sat up, body still aching from yesterday. But Will was determined to hold onto it, categorize it and file it away, remember it the way he should have the first time.

Will glanced around the room, something off about it. Not in the missing man, but in the missing animals that would have come waking him up long before his alarm.

Will got from the bed on painful legs and left the room, stepping down the stairs, being met with the scent of something cooking.

With a confused look and wishing Will had brought his gun in from the car, Will made his way to the bottom of the stairs and entered the kitchen, shocked to see a silver haired man at the stove, the dogs sitting at the edge of the kitchen, patiently waiting for Hannibal to give them the scraps of whatever he was making.

"You were supposed to go," Will muttered, stepping further into the kitchen and calling the attention of the room onto him.

"I couldn't leave without you," Hannibal stated, carefully lifting something from the frying pan and onto a plate, setting it on the counter before going back to the frying pan and placing another of whatever he had made onto another plate. "*Bulviniai blynai*," he said, setting the other plate on the counter as well. Will moved closer, looking over the fried egg and what looked nearly like a hash brown with onions and bacon in it.

"Bulvi..." Will picked up the plate and took the fork Hannibal held out to him.

"*Bulviniai blynai*," Hannibal said again, turning off the stove and picking up the plate that Will hadn't taken. "A traditional Christmas dish from when I was a child."

"Christmas?" Will still stared at Hannibal, shock in his system at the man who was so calmly in his house when he wasn't supposed to be. "A Lithuanian Christmas?"

"I would have made something a little more extravagant, but your kitchen is lacking," Hannibal explained, waiting patiently for Will to take the first bite before eating himself.

Will looked down at the plate once more and cut into the potatoes, placing the bite into his mouth and causing Hannibal to smile before he began eating himself.

"So..." Will said softly, enjoying the warmth that Hannibal brought with him to the other side of the counter. His hand rested on the small of Will's back and Will closed his eyes with a sigh. "You're staying?"

"You said you would hide and protect me, if I recall, Will. Does that still stand?" Will opened his mouth, but nothing would come out. "I would really rather think of those words as truths than as pretty lies."

"Never lies, Hannibal," Will whispered. "I just didn't think you would... Stay." He set down his plate and looked over to Hannibal, reaching out and taking Hannibal's face in his hand. “This isn’t safe for you.”

“My whole life I have done what is safe for me,” Hannibal contradicted, leaning into Will’s touch, a hand moving up to cup Will’s own hand. “I have always done what is best or what needed to be done. For once, just this once, I would very much like to do something that makes me happy, even if it’s stupid.”

Will laughed, biting his bottom lip to hold back his smile. “It’s stupid. So stupid. There’s going to be more nights like last night with Molly showing up. And you can’t go outside. Not to mention that Jack likes to drop by whenever it suits him. And I don’t think I have to mention that some of your hobbies will need to be put on hold. Hannibal, this is stupid. Stupid does not suit you, sensible does.”

“This is sensible,” Hannibal argued, kissing at Will’s palm and pulling the man closer. “I can cook for you; you know that you don’t eat nearly enough. I can take care of the dogs while you are at work.”

Will gave another laugh, letting Hannibal’s arm wrap around his waist. “You taking care of the dogs?”

Hannibal gave a nod. “I can keep the house clean and chase the monsters away at night.”

“You’re a monster, Hannibal.”

“The others wouldn’t dare touch you while I’m here.” Hannibal gave a small smile, head resting against Will’s. “Sensible.”

“Foolish.”

“You’re not making a good enough argument, Will.”

Will sighed. “You want to stay?”

“I want to stay,” Hannibal assured with a nod. “Through the blood and the sugar.”

“I have classes today,” Will announced as if this were perfectly normal, pulling from Hannibal’s grip and picking up his plate to keep eating. It felt good to have something normal back in place, as normal as Will could convince himself this was. But there was a slight bit of guilt that he pushed away at the nagging thought that he was just using Hannibal to replace what he had with Molly. “I won’t be home until around dinner time.”

“Dinner will be on the table when you get back,” Hannibal announced. “Though, it might be left overs. You need to go shopping.”

Will looked over his kitchen with a small nod. It was not what Hannibal was used to in the slightest and Will hadn’t had much of a reason to go to the store as of late with how often he was in Pennsylvania to be with Hannibal.

“I’ll pick up some things on the way home,” Will stated, shoving a mouthful of food into his mouth. How easily they slid into these roles. How easy was it for them to be domestic without a second thought? Like a married couple. Like they had been this way for years upon years. And maybe they had been. Will just wished that he could remember better. “You’re sure you’ll be alright here all day?”

“Perfectly fine.” Hannibal gave a nod.

“I’m lecturing on you, you know,” Will said as he finished off his food and went to put his plate in the sink, the dogs jumping up as he passed, begging for scraps. Will hushed them and looked up to Hannibal who hadn’t said anything, but who wore an amused look.

“They still teach about me?” he asked innocently.

“Of course they still teach about you,” Will answered, trying to hide his smile as he cleaned the plate before putting it in the dishwasher. “You’re a celebrity, but don’t let that go to your head.”

“I wouldn’t dream of it.” Hannibal came around the counter and passed Will his plate, which Will rinsed and added to the dishwasher as well. “I do not like to bask in my own accomplishments.”

“That’s all you like to do Hannibal.” Will closed the dishwasher and motioned for the dogs to move. They both did and Will tried to leave the kitchen, only for his arm to be snatched up by Hannibal and him to be turned around to find a concerned pair of eyes on him. “What?” Will asked softly.

“Is it safe to assume that Jack will be present during your lecture?” Hannibal asked just as softly as if their voices would shatter the atmosphere in the room.

Will gave a small nod. “I have to look over that case for him.”

“Our case.”

“Our case,” Will repeated in acknowledgement. “Hannibal?” Will asked curiously. “Are you worried that I’m going to give you up?” Hannibal was silent, Will not needing him to say anything for Will to know the answer. “You obviously don’t know me well enough if you think that I would do that to you.” Will frowned and his hands took either side of Hannibal’s face. “Hannibal, I have given everything to you. I’ve lied for you, been beaten and bruised for you, I’ve fought and killed for you. If after everything you still think that I would...” Will trailed off with a sigh. “I love you, Hannibal. I’m not about to give you up.”

“Forgive me,” Hannibal whispered. “The thought will never cross my mind again.”

Will dreaded the moment that he dismissed his class. Hannibal’s latest kill, the girl in the mall, was displayed on the projector screen and Will couldn’t find himself feeling nearly as sick over it as he had previously. There was something empowering about knowing exactly where this killer was and what he was doing and that he belonged wholly to Will and no one else. Not the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, not the FBI, and definitely not Jack Crawford.

The very same Jack Crawford who sat now among Will’s students, a case file waiting on the desk in front of him. A casefile waiting for Will to look through. A casefile that Will had created and would have to play dumb with.

Will gave a sigh, closing his laptop, giving permission for the class to begin packing up. “Where is the Chesapeake Ripper, *Il Mostro di Firenze*?” Will continued speaking. “Would you stay in plain sight or would you run to another country? Where would you hide?”

Will waited quietly while the class filed out of the lecture hall and then sat down at his desk, pulling his glasses from his face and rubbing at his eyes, trying to ready himself for Jack’s bombardment.

There was a slap of the casefile being dropped onto his desk in front of him and Will opened his eyes, hand slowly reaching out for it. *Play the part*, he reminded himself, the words in his head belonging to Hannibal. *Don’t get reckless, Will. You must always play the game, keep them in check.*

With a deep breath, Will opened the file and pulled it closer to better see what he already knew. There were pictures of Hall Mansion, a bloody tower on private property. Two men on top of the tower, one shot, one stabbed, bare footprints in dried blood that belonged to Hannibal, which was fine. As long as they couldn’t place Will there.

Dr. Liam Jefferies in the snow, skin somehow more pale and sickly looking in the picture than he had looked that night. That night... God. Two nights ago? Had it been such a short amount of time? It felt like a year had passed between then and now and Will felt his stomach twist at the thought.

And then all the evidence was there as well. Bullet casings, the suit Hannibal had been wearing, guns lost over the side of the tower, Hannibal’s cell phone and Will’s magazine that had been lost in the snow. He would have to get that back somehow. It was possible they could trace it back to him. It would have his finger prints on it and his prints were in the system now, ever since his trip through the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. It didn’t matter if the gun was a standard issue and millions of other officers had the same one. He needed to get into the evidence locker and into the computers. He had to delete all of that from the system.

God. What mess had he gotten himself into? And he wasn’t even questioning his thoughts. Before Hannibal he never would have considered tampering with evidence. The Georgia Madchen case had nearly killed him when he had tampered that crime scene, granted he did it unconsciously, but it had ruined any possible chance to find fingerprints that could have led to Georgia's capture much sooner than it did.

And now he was openly planning to hijack a federal lab to protect a serial killer, a serial killer who had all but captured him, trapped him, and tamed him. A serial killer that Will should have been deathly afraid of, one that should have killed him long ago.

"...think?"

"What?" Will asked, shaking his head and trying to remove himself from his mind.

"I said, what do you think?" Jack repeated, a hand resting on Will's desk, eyes pointedly on Will.

Will sighed and placed his glasses back on. "So you have officially placed Hannibal there," Will stated, closing the file and placing his glasses back on his nose.

"That is his suit and his footprints. He was there. The question that I need answered is what the hell was he doing on that tower in the middle of a blizzard with no clothes on." Jack gave a small chuckle. "Is he insane?"

Will shook his head. "We both know he's not Jack. The courts just didn't know what to do with him when he was incarcerated. They wanted an easy out instead of years of paperwork. He's not crazy. He's all there when he kills."

"And he killed these three?"

"I..." Will trailed off and bit his tongue as if in thought. "I see the ripper, but I do not feel the ripper."

Jack gave a small nod. "Alright. So who did it then?"

Will leaned forward and his fingers tapped on his desk as he tried to seem like he was pulling a profile from the air instead of his mind yelling his own name in his head over and over again.

"There was more than just Hannibal up there. Hannibal wasn't the only killer. You've identified the other three?"

"Not the man in the snow. He's not in any databases." Jack went and snatched up a chair and pulled it to Will's desk, taking a seat.

"He won't be."

"How is Walter, Will?"

Will blinked and glanced over at Jack with a suspicious look. "I haven't seen Wally since we processed that crime scene in Hershey. Molly thinks that I am a danger to our son." The words were far more bitter than Will meant them to be, a harsh bite to them. "Sorry." He sighed and rubbed at the back of his neck. "It's not your problem."

"No," Jack agreed with a nod of his head. "It's not, but neither was my wife's illness. I am here for you to talk to if you need." The words were genuine and Will almost felt guilty for what he knew he would eventually have to do to Jack. He had always considered Jack a good friend, even if that friend liked to drag him into dangerous situations, because Will understood why Jack continually tried to pull him back in. They were a good team, even if Will felt like he did most of the work. But if Will continued down this path, the one into the dark that was being guided by a wendigo, then Jack was going to be an enemy very soon. “Whatever you need.”

“Thank you,” Will said, unable to keep the small hint of shock from his tone. “Really, Jack. That means a lot.”

“Do you want to talk about it then?” Jack asked, a kind smile still on his face. Will shook his head. “Alright. Then tell me why he won’t be in any of my databases.”

Will was giving Jack a lot to work with at the moment. Was he giving Jack too much to work with? It would come back to Alana and Margot and then in turn led to Hannibal, or at least to the fact that Hannibal had been with Alana and Margot and Will couldn’t turn against them. Not when they had done so much for Hannibal.

“He...” Will trailed off, his face scrunching up in dislike as he tried to think of how to word this so he didn’t give away enough, but gave Jack something to work with. “When-when...” Will pulled his glasses from his face and tossed them onto the desk, lowering his head into his hands with a deep breath. “When we were held at the Verger’s home and Mason tried to have us killed, uh...” Will sat up and licked his lips, feeling a concerned gaze from Jack. “The doctor that was there for Mason had a brother.” Will tapped on the file. “This is his brother. I remember seeing him around once or twice.”

“Do you have a name?”

Will shook his head and leaned back in his chair, a hand rubbing at his jaw that probably needed a shave. “Can...”

“Yes, Will?”

“Can I see the bodies? The evidence?” Will asked, meeting Jack’s eyes.

Jack gave a single nod.

* * *

“Cause of death,” Price announced as Will was led into the lab. “Hitting the ground obviously. Though he does have an interesting nick in his neck that I think I was able to place back to a-” Price turned around, his smile falling slightly at the sight of Will, thinking it was going to be only Jack, but his smile quickly brightened. “We missed you the other night.”

“I’m sorry I wasn’t present for a *ménage à trois*,” Will shot back, causing Zeller to snort.

“Did you tell him?” Price asked, looking over to where Zeller was sitting at his computer.

“Like I have to tell him,” Zeller stated, getting from where he sat, leaving his computer unlocked. He wore a smile. “It is his job to find dark secrets for a living. Good to see you, Will.” Zeller held out his hand and Will shook it, returning the smile. It felt good to be back here, even with all of the nightmares the room held, it was like a home away from home.

Jack was silent, and Will glanced over his shoulder, seeing a slight shock over the man’s features. “You didn’t know?” Will questioned, hands going to his hips, all other eyes in the room going to Jack.

“He’s known,” Beverly’s voice said somewhere behind Will, only making Will smile more. “He just didn’t want to be told outright that these two were together. But they’ve been together for years.”

“This is not work appropriate,” Jack announced.

“We solve murders for a living,” Zeller pointed out, stepping down towards where the bodies were on the cold metal tables. “I don’t think there’s such a thing as not work appropriate in our field.”

“What were you saying about his neck?” Jack pressed, obviously wanting to move on.

“Oh,” Price said, jumping back to what he had scribbled on his clipboard. “He has a cut in his neck and it looks like it was made by some sort of knife. The indentation wasn’t very deep, so it’s a little harder to place what type of blade was used, but I think it’s safe to assume that the same knife used on dead guy’s leg was used on his neck. So we’re looking at is a hunting knife.”

Price set his clipboard down and walked over to one of the large cold lockers and pulled open the door to one, having Zeller, Will and Jack follow after him. Price pulled the sliding platform out and Will blinked as a ballistics dummy, from the pecks up with multiple stab wounds, jiggled with the movement before slowly going still. Around it was a mass collection of different knives and still stabbed morbidly into the top of its head was a knife that Will recognized. A copy of his own knife that was still sitting in his car, waiting to be taken out and cleaned. Will had driven the spare car, thankfully.

Will glanced around and saw Jack looking extremely impatient and Zeller impressed with his lover’s work. Price pulled the knife from the head of the dummy and held it out, letting Jack take it to look over.

The knife was black from handle to blade, sharp and pointed with a serrated edge at the hilt. In the handle was a blade to cut fishing lines that Will used quite often.

“This knife is a SOG, military grade,” Price continued. Will took the knife when Jack held it out to him, trying to keep the shaking in his fingers to a minimum. “What’s interesting about this knife is the bowie style clip-point shape for any piercing cuts. It gives the stabs a particular shape that this knife matches exactly. This is our murder weapon.”

Will passed the knife onto Zeller who simply gave it back to Price, having obviously been present when the discovery was made.

“Are you going to tell them?” Beverly asked, leaning against the cold lockers and picking up the hunting knife, stabbing it into the ballistics gel dummy’s shoulder. Will shook his head minutely. Beverly folded her arms and sighed. “How are you going to hide this from them? They will figure it out.”

“Can I have a moment?” Will asked softly. “To-to work?” Jack gave a nod and motioned for Zeller and Price to leave the lab so that Will could work. Will waited patiently for the three men to leave before looking over Beverly. “You know exactly what I have to do,” he muttered, moving away from the cold locker and going over to Zeller’s still open computer, sitting down.

“This isn’t right Will.” Beverly stood beside the desk now, hand on his shoulder. Will shrugged it off. “And you know it.”

“I have to protect him.”

“No, you really don’t.” Beverly gave a sigh as she watched Will dig through Zeller’s files until he found all of the photos for the evidence. There were thousands and he didn’t have the time to dig through each one individually. “You don’t need to do anything for Hannibal. He’s not in control of you, you know. You can fight him.”

“I don’t want to fight him.”

“He doesn’t love you.”

Will frowned and closed his eyes. “Shut up.”

“He’s not capable of love,” Beverly continued, voicing all of Will’s fears for him to hear aloud. “He’s a monster.”

“No,” Will argued softly, clicking on the file and dragging it over to the recycle bin on the desktop. “He’s not.”

“He’s a serial killer,” Beverly stated strongly, her eyes bright on Will, making Will shift uncomfortably as he stared ahead at the path he was picking. Darkness and something as old and as evil as darkness to be his guide. “He has tried to kill you multiple times. He framed you for his murders. He has-”

“I know what he’s done,” Will muttered, file still hovering over the recycle bin. “But none of that matters. I-I... I need him, Beverly. I’m never more clearly present than with him in my head. I am lost without him. He... makes me feel normal and sane and not like I’m a freak. He loves me.”

“No, he doesn’t.”

Will inhaled deeply and dropped the file into the recycling bin, watching a loading bar show up. He waited for it to finish and then right clicked on the recycling box, hitting the empty recycling bin option. Another loading bar appeared on the screen and then a box, a last checkpoint, a final reminder of the choice he was making appeared.

Are you sure you want to permanently delete all of these items?

Yes. No.

Yes.

Will watched as the loading bar, a bright and toxic green slowly filled up, the percentage climbing and then the box disappearing. He then went into the setting and quickly backed up the computer, saving this version of the computer over the others. Will wasn’t sure if Price had any of the pictures on his computer and he didn’t have the time to try to guess his password to see. He just had to finish this and find his gun magazine.

Once the backup was made, Will hit restore and let the computer shut down as he rushed over to the table that had bags of evidence across it. Will glanced around the room, waiting for another warning from Beverly, but found her nowhere to be seen and Will wondered if maybe he had left her back at the crossroads.

Will dug through the bags and found his magazine in one of them, shoving the bag into his jacket pocket just as the lab door opened up and Jack came strolling in, causing Will's heart to jump painfully in his chest.

"Can I see the case file again?" Will asked as he walked over to the team, holding out his hand. Jack placed the file in Will's hand and Will opened it, digging through all of the photos present, stopping on one of his magazine lying in the snow. He looked back up at the bodies. "I told you there was more than Hannibal being a killer, right?" Will asked.

"Yes," Jack nodded.

"One of them is your mystery man," Will stated. "If Hannibal did kill these people, it wasn't with a gun. He doesn't like guns."

"What makes you say that?" Zeller questioned curiously.

Will gave a shrug, trying to keep his breathing steady as his heart continued to race. "None of his killings have ever been done with a gun, for one. Two, it's just not in his nature. I am sure he could handle a gun if it came down to it, but it's not his choice. A gun is impersonal, creates distance. It's over too quickly."

"So is severing a major artery," Price pointed out.

"That's different," Will said simply, pulling out the lump of pictures in the case file, tossing the folder aside and laying several pictures out on the table. The building, the foot prints, the man in a puddle of his own blood. "This is art to him. Look at the way the blood decorated the building." Will dug through some more of the pictures, tossing out another one onto the table and glanced around, making sure that everyone's eyes were on the pictures he had laid out, he snatched up the one of his gun magazine and shoved it into his pocket. "He painted this building deliberately. But I don't know what his connection between him and these three men is. Until you get this man's name, I don't have much more for you."

"You gave us plenty, Will," Jack assured. "Thank you for looking for me."

Will gave a nod and placed the pictures back down on the folder and gave a sigh. "I need to get home. The dogs need to be taken care of."

"I'll walk you out," Jack offered kindly. Will gave a hesitant nod and bid goodbye to both Zeller and Price before leaving the lab with Jack behind him. "What do you make of the phone?"

"Phone?" Will asked, glancing over his shoulder at Jack, the bag in his jacket pocket seeming to get bigger and heavier the longer he stayed in the man's presence.

"Dr. Lecter's phone," Jack pushed. Will licked at his lips and turned the corner that led out to the parking lot. He should have known that Jack wasn't going to drop it. "You were the last call. Why you, Will?"

"He's obsessed with me," Will answered with a shrug, stepping out into the cool evening air. "I'm not sure what else you want me to tell you. You're the one who said he kidnapped me and held me hostage and away from the world for three months. He likes to be in my mind, he can't let me go. What is it that you're hoping for?"

Jack gave a shrug, a smile not hiding the many theories that were running through the man's mind. "Nothing," he finally replied. "I just want to understand the bond that you two share. Even now, I know it's there."

"Bond?" Will asked with a laugh, pulling his car keys from his pocket. "What bond? There's nothing between us. There never was and never will be."

"You expect me to believe that Will?" Jack questioned, causing Will to pause. His hand rested on the roof of his car, other hand on the door handle. He looked back up at Jack with as blank an expression as he could, causing Jack to laugh. "You and Hannibal, it's..." Jack trailed off in thought. "It was the same strange connection that was there between you and Abigail Hobbs. Something that's not supposed to be there, but flourishes."

"A weed in the crack in the sidewalk," Will muttered, fist knocking on the top of the car a few times.

"So, how many more than private conversations were held between the two of you?" Jack pushed, making Will shift uncomfortably. "How much do you really remember and how much are you playing off? How intimate is your relationship with Hannibal Lecter?"

"Are you trying to suggest that we..." Will trailed off, not wanting to give Jack the satisfaction of saying the words out loud. Jack waited patiently with expectant eyes. "Jack, I am happily-I am married," Will quickly corrected. "I have a son and a family that is slowly crumbling apart. I don't have time for Hannibal Lecter to be anything more than a footnote of a case still being worked by the FBI."

"Alright," Jack said, backing down enough that Will could breathe. "Will, I-"

Will's phone rang and Jack fell silent. Will pulled his phone from his pocket and glanced over the number. Molly. What did Molly want? With a deep sigh, Will answered the phone and put it to his ear.

"House visits and phone calls?" Will asked, unable to keep the slight annoyance from his words.

"I would expect a much kinder tone for your wife, Will," a thickly accented voice said across the line.

Will's eyebrows furrowed and he pulled the phone from his ear to check the number once more. "Jordan?" he asked into the phone when it was back against his ear. "What-Where's Molly?"

"She's right here. Safe and sound. So is Walter," Jordan answered, voice calmly dark and not his usual bright tone. Will looked over to Jack and lowered his phone from his ear, putting it on speaker.

"Can I speak to one of them?" Will asked cautiously, watching as Jack moved closer to better hear the call.

"Your instincts were correct, Will," Jordan continued on, ignoring Will's request. Will's hands clenched into fists and he closed his eyes. If only the evidence had been there. If only he could have pegged them quicker. But they had been good. There was a reason they were on number 13. His number 13. "Don't push them away in the future. If there is a future."

“Jordan, please,” Will begged, unsure of what else to do exactly. Each breath was beginning to hurt as his chest constricted. “Why them? They didn’t do anything.”

“I’m afraid you condemned your family, Will,” Jordan answered. “Only someone possessed and evil could break down their own marriage like you have, adulterer. You aren’t here for them, Will. You never were.”

“I can be,” Will said desperately, looking over Jack who had thankfully missed the last bit of that sentence and stepped away, his own phone to his ear, giving soft commands to either Zeller or Price. “I can be there for them now. Please, tell me where they are.”

“We can’t start until you’re here,” Jordan said, his tone reminding. “You know us Will. It’s flattering, really. And I think you could be a good father to Walter, but you’re far too wrapped up in your work to be that.”

“We still don’t fit your profile,” Will pointed out, trying to buy himself some time for Jack to return back to hear more of the phone call.

“You used your money to obtain your wife and child, Will. You didn’t have much to your name until you won your court case. I would say that you fit the bill just fine. Both Casey and I agree that the sin is enough. You didn’t work for it, Will. You stole it from the government.”

“We aren’t a family of six.”

“Price and Zeller are getting their gear,” Jack whispered over to Will, trying not to interrupt the call that was going on. “Tell us where they are.”

Will waved at Jack to be quiet and the hand ran through his curls as the line went silent, waiting for Jordan to answer. Waiting for Jordan’s justification. Anything from Jordan. Something that told Will Jordan was still there.

“Jordan?” Will asked after a moment, hoping that Jack hadn’t tipped him off. “We’re not a family of six.”

“With you here, there will be six,” Jordan finally answered. Will gave a confused look, trying to think of who else Jordan could possibly be thinking of.

“Molly’s parent’s house,” Will said breathlessly, pulling open the car door. “I’ll text you the address.”

“I would come alone, Will,” Jordan warned, causing Will to pause in his actions. “I am not above using Walter as needed to get what I want.”

“That’s not how you operate,” Will pointed out, mouth dry. “You don’t kill the children.”

“I have no issue killing the children. Casey is the squeamish one,” Jordan explained with a smile to his voice. “The children are not part of the ritual. And if our 11th family showed you anything, I do not need all six members home to complete the cleansing ritual, though I do prefer it.”

Will inhaled deeply and exhaled. “I need a sign of good faith. Let me talk to Walter. If he’s alright, I will come alone.” Will could feel the anger radiate off Jack, but he ignored it. Jack’s emotional rage of a teaspoon was not what was important. It was protecting these people. Protecting his wife and his son and her family. That was what was important. “Let me talk to my son.”

“A sign of good faith?”

“Yes!” Will gasped out, breathless. “You would want to speak to Danny if the roles were switched, wouldn’t you? I know you care for Danny like I do for Wally. Please, let me speak to my son.”

There was a silence and a fumbling of the phone before a small voice came across the line. “Dad?”

“Walter.” Will let out a breath he hadn’t been aware of holding, relief flooding him at his son’s voice. “Is everyone alright?”

“Dad, you’re coming to help, right?”

“Yes,” Will said quickly with a nod, catching both Zeller and Price racing from the building, followed by several other agents that Will didn’t recognize or much care about at the moment. “I will be there soon. I promise. Everything is going to be ok. I need you to be strong for me.”

“Was that good enough for your faith?” Jordan asked.

“Yes.”

“Come alone.”

“I will,” Will assured, receiving disapproving looks from Zeller and Price at the idea of Will going in alone. But Will had to agree. He had to play this game. He would forever be playing a game now. He just had to make sure the game was his and not anyone else’s. Not Hannibal’s and definitely not Jordan’s. The line went dead and he shoved his phone back into his pocket. “The house is in Birchwood at Brambleton,” Will explained, climbing into his car.

“That’s an hour away,” Price muttered. “That really fancy, old person, gated place, right?”

“That’s the one,” Zeller answered with a nod.

“I have to go in first. Jordan will kill everyone if we just barge in.” Will stated, starting his car with the door still open so that he could speak to the team.

“We’ll discuss it on the way,” Jack informed Will, motioned for Zeller and Price to gather up their agents to get to where they needed to go. Will watched as Jack climbed into the passenger side of the car and Will felt a stickiness coat his mouth at having to spend the whole ride with Jack. Will closed his car door with a determined nod and put the car in gear, stomping on the gas and pulling from the parking lot. “I am not sending you in there alone.”

“You sent me to Dr. Lecter alone,” Will grumbled, wishing he had been at home when this call came in. He would have been closer. He could have just called Jack after all of it was done. Do whatever he needed to do to protect his family and fudge the details in the aftermath.

“We didn’t know what he was.”

Will gave a forced laugh. “I told you what he was.”

“This is not the place for this argument.”

“There’s never a place for this argument, Jack.” Will glanced both ways and seeing that traffic was clear, ran the red light, hitting the exit for the freeway as quickly as he could. “I have to go in alone Jack. I’ll be armed. It will be alright. If a gunshot goes off, all of your goonies can come to my rescue, but let me deescalate the situation before it escalates into something that we can’t handle that gets my family killed.”

“You’re too emotionally close to this case. I can’t have you going in.”

“Jordan will expect me and I am not letting someone go in there while my family needs help. I will never forgive myself if something happens.”

Will didn’t bother with a turn indicator as he wove in and out of cars, barely checking his mirrors, a dark look from Jack, though he didn’t say a word against it, silent in a grumbled agreement.

Horror dressed itself into a checkered suit and a plastered smile over its skeletal features. Words were spoken, thoughts swirled, sounds drowned out. And for the first time in his life, his gaze was unfocused. There was a distraction in his life, one that made him question everything, not only about the world but about himself. Someone was unraveling him from the inside out and he was left exposed and oh so vulnerable.

Something had always been missing and he hated to admit that no amount of Bâtard-Montrachet would ever fill that ache of loneliness that he couldn’t exactly name until this moment.

He was constantly lost and found in those tempera blue eyes. His blood sang when the man was near, the skies suddenly full of color again at the single mention of his name. Any room the man entered transformed into a Van Gogh painting. The way the man could command color without even knowing he could was magnificent, ecstatic beauty. And he was more than content, though terrified, to be powerless against the man’s charm.

Suddenly, there was only one thing of any value in his life and it was that man, that man with the wild curly hair and the empathy disorder, that made his old heart beat once more, a feeling of impossibility to love him, but a want to try all the same.

Yet, through the fear, he was alive once more. Nothing, not since he was a child, had been worth living for, a life of simply going through the motions, but this man had turned his whole world upside down. For years he had tried to avoid it. After all, if you ignore the knock on the door long enough, the person will eventually leave, wouldn’t they?

But he wasn’t leaving. The knocking increased until he opened the door was snatched up in love’s nagging and tantalizing claws. No matter how hard he ran, how much blood he spilt, it followed him, doomed from the moment he opened that door, into the darkest crevices of his being.

So be submitted, surrendered. There wasn’t another choice. And there he sat, day in and day out, clinging to the poetry that escaped those perfect lips made from Monet’s unparalleled shadowing techniques. Legs crossed, heart pounding, eyes hidden, remaining steadfast in the presence of everything he loved.

He knew he had to hold onto some of his former self, if only for preservation. He couldn’t let the darkest desires take over. If he fell headfirst into his feelings then there was no knowing how long he would last in his exposed state. So he placed a layer of ice around himself in a form of protection, something that would offer him at least a chance to observe from a distance.

He signed away his fate, ready to be bound away for the sake of safety over the mistreatment of his own self, a steep price, but one he paid. But the ice wasn’t strong enough. Even the mighty glaciers melted and soon he found him, that man caused the ice to fade away, turning into nothing more than a puddle.

He tried to build the glaze back up, but he could never quite wipe the worry from his features. He knew that no matter how tireless his efforts were there would always remain a crack that would give way to the summer the man brought with him, the sun into his cold winter nights.

His fight was gone after a single plea from those lips. He let summer consume him and heat his bones back to life. He let himself feel and it would be the death of him, but he was so ready to die for this man. Ready to give everything away for this man. Just to keep this man’s Botticelli tempera blue eyes in his life.

Botticelli tempera blue eyes that had not returned home yet from the classes he was teaching. Classes about the horror in a checkered suit and paisley tie, with a matching pocket square. The summer heat had yet to walk through that front door and it worried him. The sun was meant to have returned home an hour ago and was still nowhere to be found and he found himself helpless to do anything, having trapped himself, caged his own soul, to this cabin in the middle of Wolf Trap, Virginia. All he could do was hope that the winter wouldn’t keep the man away from home for long.

Il tuo discorso ti rende manifesto, *i quella nobil patria natio a la qual forse fui troppo molesto*-

Your talk makes you manifest, I that noble homeland to which I was perhaps too troublesome-

Subitamente questo suono uscio d'una de l'arche; pero` m'accostai, temendo, un poco piu` al duca mio.

Suddenly this sound comes out of one of the arcs; but I approached, fearing, a little more to my duke.

Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

> “Casey was right to like you, Will Graham. You are a very interesting read. A shame it has to be like this.”

Chapter Notes

> Hey guys. I felt bad about waiting so long to post. Just been so insane with work and what not, bleh, bleh, bleh, life. So I thought I would give you guys a second chapter as a gift and a sorry. Haha. I hope you all enjoy it. It's small and sweet, I hope.
>
> This is also the song I was apparently listening to when I wrote this one: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFlR0FVQP34&list=FLwLqnHcI0OXnXKnVDRRTX-Q&index=399

Losing You
Terrifies Me

Will denied the tactical armor that was offered to him and Jack just about blew a fuse when all Will wanted was his gun when he went into the house. But Will had to do this. He knew what Jordan was capable of. He had seen enough pictures, rescued Walter from one before, to know exactly what would be waiting for him if he didn't play by Jordan's rules a little longer.

Will made sure that the team stayed a good street away from his in-law's house. Nothing that would set off alarms for the Witch Hunters who were dictated by ritual, but could break from it if needed. Rituals of sixes and thirteens.

A family of six. Molly's parents, Walter, Molly, Molly's sister who had picked the very unfortunate time to visit, and Will Graham.

A gated community, Will finally having reports of the employees for the communities read to him in the car. Casey had been the missing link between all of them. He worked weekends as the gate guard. People knew him, liked him. He could let them in or his coworkers were comfortable enough to let them into the communities without them having to be on the lists. And this community had been no different, Casey willing to travel for work if it meant their killing ground became larger, harder to build a geographical profile.

A large house that screamed expensive, far away from the others so no one could hear any screams. Someone wealthy, someone having come into money that they didn't deserve. Sins unforgivable to the killing couple. A father who had failed his family.

Will stepped up to the house and looked over the dark windows, the porch lights on. All cars were accounted for in the driveway. Nothing out of place for someone not looking or caring to notice details. There were no dogs barking, meaning either all of them had been moved onto better homes or they had been silenced. Will hoped it was the first, was nearly certain that it was the first. Molly wouldn't let her elderly parents take care of nearly a dozen dogs, especially if she wasn't around to help.

Will pulled his gun from his holster and pushed open the front door that had been left slightly ajar. Not enough to be noticed from the street, but enough that the door swung open freely. Will stepped cautiously into the house, glancing around the entryway that was decently open. Nothing, no one. The sun was still setting, so the house wasn't quite as dark as it could have been, a burning red decorating the white walls.

They would be in the dining area. The murders had been committed in the largest areas of the houses. Areas that made it easy to grab weapons and that had places to tie people down. The dining room was the largest area of this house, Molly's parents enjoying all of their grandkids visiting during the summer, their family rather large compared to Will being the only one left of his as far as he was aware, not sure and not caring enough to track down anyone from his mother's side of the family.

Will knew this house. Had been dragged here many times by Molly for dinners that he found horribly uncomfortable. Dinners where they treated him like he was a teenager again. Not understanding his odd ticks and quirks, wanting to know when they were going to get married, wanting to know when they would have more grandchildren. And Molly was ever graceful, knew all the right things to say when Will didn't. And Will could tell them what he thought, wanted to tell them that he would never have a child to pass on the worst of himself into, but he couldn't, Hannibal's warnings of Will being rude forever in his mind. Because even if Hannibal had been locked away, he still lived on forever in Will's head, always in the shared spaces of their mind palace, forever Will's own mental voice.

Will made his way through the circle that was the main floor until he came to the dining room. It was a massive room with a large ornate dark wooden table and chairs in the center of navy blue walls. A chandelier hung from the ceiling, highlighting the crown molding and the expensive art that Will had always been curious if Hannibal would approve of.

Will came to a stop, gun up as he took in the scene. A perfect family dinner set up, something eerily similar to the Lost Boy's last suppers. Molly's mother and father, both greying and well into their late 80's were on one side of the table, tied to the chairs that had been so openly bragged about being hand carved from Turkey, duct tape across their mouths, blind folded. On the opposite side of the table sat Molly's sister. A woman who looked nearly identical to Molly save for a larger nose and horribly box dyed fire engine red hair. Next to her was Walter. Both were tied and blind folded as well.

The blind folds were interesting. They caught Will's attention immediately and he wondered if all of the other children had been blind folded. Wondered if Casey really was as squeamish as Jordan had said over the phone, far too ashamed to look his victims in the eyes when he finally killed them. Because Casey would have the gun. Jordan would have the knife. And they did.

Casey stood behind Walter's chair, gun to the boy's head, eyes on Will with what could have been almost an apologetic look. At least something in the realm of regret. Beliefs too strong to be stopped by the dislike of killing. Or Jordan too terrifying for Casey to stop.

As for Jordan. He sat at the head of the table, spinning a large kitchen knife, ones that matched Hannibal's almost identically, that had the tip stabbed into the wood of the table. His suit was impeccable, something the man prided himself on. And before him, tied by wrists and ankles to the table top was Molly.

She wore a lovely dress of white, one that she would only wear on special occasions and Will was curious as to what the occasion had been tonight or if maybe Jordan had made her put it on just to make Will think.

Her mouth was duct taped as well, but she wasn't blind folded. She wasn't a child after all. But the binding was new. Different. Something that Jordan hadn't done at the other scenes. Maybe it was to keep Molly in place while they waited for Will to arrive. Will had driven as quickly as he could, but it had still taken him nearly fifty minutes to get there. That would have been a long time to keep a family contained, even for Jordan.

Down the length of the table were lit candles and Will could make out the aromatic scent of burning sage. The table was also surrounded by a thick layer of salt. Everything in place, everything where it needed to be. Everything just as Jordan designed.

"Nice of you to finally join us," Jordan said, causing the room to shift at the change in atmosphere. "Traffic must not have been that bad."

"Relatively light," Will answered, gun still up and trained on Jordan. He glanced down at Molly who had lifted her head up to better look over Will. Will met her gaze for a moment, but couldn't exactly place what her expression meant, most of Molly's ques coming from her mouth and not her eyes. "Let my family go, Jordan."

Jordan's brows furrowed and he sat back in his chair, knife still twirling and catching the red light from the sun. "I don't think I will. I need to complete the ritual. And they know us. We can't let them live."

“Jordan, please, let my family go,” Will begged, gun going up in surrender like his hands. “You can have me. I’m the one you truly want, aren’t I?” Jordan pursed his lips, looking as if he were considering the idea. “I’m the one who came into money unfairly, I’m the one who is ruining my marriage, I’m the one who’s not a good enough father to my son. Let my family go, they've done nothing wrong. Everything was me.”

Casey gave a dumbfounded look and turned to Jordan who gave Casey a small nod. Casey opened his mouth to speak, but at a stern expression from Jordan, Casey simply obeyed. He released Walter and moved over to Will, taking the gun from Will’s hand and setting it down on the table, out of reach. He patted down Will, much better than Dr. Liam’s men had, pulling the evidence bag and the picture from his coat pocket and adding them to the table with curiosity.

Casey then moved to where Molly’s parents sat, untying the older woman first and leading her from the room, still blindfolded and duct taped. Will inhaled deeply, ready to move if Casey’s gun decided to go off. But all was silent until Casey returned and did the same to Molly’s dad and then sister, but stopped when Jordan waved him off.

“Walter too,” Will stated, quickly wishing he hadn’t. He was in no position to demand. Not yet. Jordan rose to his feet with a dark and challenging look. “Please. Think of Danny. Please let Walter go.”

“Stop bringing my son into this,” Jordan said, voice strong and steady as he slammed the knife into the table next to Molly’s head. Molly jumped and gave a small whine, tears on her cheeks.

“Jordan,” Casey said, voice meek and small. “If this was Danny-”

“It’s not Danny,” Jordan interrupted. “Stop being so pathetic, Casey. Grow some backbone for once in your life.” Jordan’s eyes returned to Will, dark. “And I’ve been kind. I let them go. You don’t get to ask for anything else. I have been more than fair.”

Will gave a small nod, arms starting to hurt a bit from being up in the air. “Please don’t hurt them,” Will whispered. “Do whatever you want to me, I won’t fight you. Just please don’t hurt them. I’m begging you Jordan.” Will carefully lowered his hands to his sides and looked over to Casey. He would be better to deal with than Jordan, easier to convenience. The man was jumpy and shaking, obviously not wanting to be in this room any longer. “Casey, please let Walter go.”

“I-I...” Casey broke off at Jordan’s harsh glare, Jordan stepping around the table, pulling the knife free from the wood with surprising strength in a single arm. He stepped closer to Casey and a hand took Casey’s cheek lovingly. “Please let Walter go. The boy didn’t do anything. The children should not be blamed for the sins of the parents.”

“*Ukochany*,” the word was said in warning, though Will wasn’t exactly sure what it meant, but recalled Casey being called it before.

“Please let Walter go.”

“*Przykro mi. Nie mogę.*”

Jordan placed a kiss to Casey’s lips, something without much feeling in it.

Will stared at the horrified look that covered Casey’s face as the knife pushed through his stomach like his skin was butter, sending Will slamming back into a kitchen where he had been gutted by his own love, though purposefully left alive. There was nothing kind in Jordan's features, nothing telling Will that Jordan was doing this to keep Casey out of the way but still living. No. This was where Casey was going to die. Was possibly always meant to die. Jordan's design.

Casey gasped and his hands reached out, taking Jordan's arms for balance just as Will's had gripped at Hannibal's. But unlike Hannibal, Jordan didn't reach out for Casey, didn't tell him about a teacup coming back together and a world that could have been. Jordan didn't cry, telling Casey to drift away in his own mind so he didn't feel pain any longer. Jordan wasn't sorry.

Casey fell to the floor, hands trembling as they tried in vain to hold himself back together, to stop the bleeding, the pooling of life around his body. Will looked between Casey and Jordan, something in him wanting to help Casey like he had wanted help back in that kitchen, but a deeper primal urge kept him firmly in place to keep his own life.

Jordan gave a sigh and turned to Will with an apologetic look. "Sorry," he said, lifting the crimson dripping knife that looked like it was burning in the sunset. "My husband sometimes forgets his place and needs to be taught it again."

"Will this ruin your ritual?" Will asked carefully.

Jordan shook his head. "I don't think that God will mind an extra sacrifice. As long as you and Mrs. Graham are taken care of correctly, then the ritual will be a success. If you would lay on the table, please, Will. And please don't make me ask twice."

Will slowly moved to the table and pushed himself up onto it, laying down across the cold wood, eyes up at the ceiling. He could hear the ropes that held Molly in place digging into the table beneath them as she struggled, wrist having been tied to wrist and ankle to ankle. He waited patiently for the next step, mentally finding where his gun was on the table, ready to reach for it when the time allowed.

He would be first. The strongest would go first and then Molly. Walter would be last. Most likely slower than the previous children's killing had been now that Casey had stopped making sounds other than a shallow inhale and exhale every so often.

Jordan appeared back in his vision and Will flinched as something cold dripped onto his face from Jordan's hand. "Holy water?" he asked curiously.

Jordan smiled with a small nod. "We have to cleanse your body before we can cleanse your soul," Jordan explained. "No one has ever cared to ask."

"No one else is like me," Will offered, listening to the way Molly was sobbing behind her duct tape, silently begging her to be quiet so that Jordan wouldn't rise to anger and quicken this ritual. Everyone on the outside would be more preoccupied with the released hostages and getting EMTs to look them over at the moment, not on Will. "I would enjoy an explanation of each step, Jordan. Just for curiosity's sake."

"Casey was right to like you, Will Graham. You are a very interesting read. A shame it has to be like this."

"Truly a tragedy," Will agreed with a nod, trying not to cough as a bundle of burning sage was passed over him and smoke made his eyes water.

“The next step will be a bit tricky, but I’m sure I can manage,” Jordan continued on in explanation. “An exorcism while I pull your soul from your body. Normally Casey would read it aloud for me, but under current circumstances...” Jordan glanced behind himself and towards where Casey’s body lay. “Luckily enough for you, I have it memorized.”

“That is good news.”

“I did love him,” Jordan clarified as if he had to explain so that Will wouldn’t judge him. “I still love him. Will always love him. Casey just-”

“Wasn’t useful anymore,” Will offered lightly.

“Exactly.” Jordan gave a bright smile at Will before looking back to his husband. “I knew you were special, Will Graham. You understand people like us.” Will sat up slightly, watching as Jordan’s hand absently reached for the knife, eyes still down on Casey whose only sign of life were the pink bubbles that were forming by his mouth in the puddle of blood. “Casey would have understood more if Danny was out of the picture.”

“Where is Danny, Jordan?” Will asked, sitting up a little more, reaching cautiously for his gun, it still horridly out of reach.

“With his grandparents,” Jordan answered, back still to Will, though his hand had stopped inching towards the knife. Will had to be fast. Any movement and Jordan would turn back to him. And Will wouldn’t win Jordan in a battle of strength. Will was as good as dead if Jordan turned back around, but Casey had placed it so far away. “He’s safe. It would have been Casey’s last wish.”

With a quick thought, Will snatched up the kitchen knife that had gone tacky with Casey’s blood and shoved it down, through Jordan’s hand and into the wood of the table. Jordan let out a cry of pain, knees buckling, and Will got to his knees on the table, driving for his gun.

Will scooped up the weapon and turned back to Jordan who had pulled the knife free with a dark look on his face, knife raised over his head. Will pulled the trigger, crack echoing through the spacious house and bullet hitting Jordan’s shoulder with the knife. There was a scream from Molly and a whimper from Walter as the knife clanked to the ground. Will lined the sights up and pulled the trigger once more, breath held tightly in his lungs.

Jordan stumbled back as the marks that had been left on all of the children scared his own forehead with no band aid to be left for remorse. Jordan collapsed to the ground and Will sat up, finding Jordan laying in Casey’s blood, both wide eyed and blank faced.

Will jumped up, shoving his gun into his holster and snatching up the evidence he had stolen to shove back into his jacket pockets. He then rushed over to where Walter was tied. He pulled the knots loose and then removed the duct tape, but stopped Walter’s hands as they went to remove the blind fold.

“You wait for me. Do not look,” Will instructed. “I will lead you outside once I get your mother.” Will released Walter and moved over to Molly, pulling the duct tape from her mouth as well. “Are you alright?” Will asked as his steady hands untied the knots around one of Molly’s wrists and then moved to her ankles.

“I thought you were dead,” Molly whispered, voice surprisingly strong for what had happened.

Will jumped as he was snatched up into a hug from Molly. An awkwardness settled into his body and he patted Molly's hand, unsure of what else to do. She released him and he turned around to finish untying her hands and feet. Once free, Molly snatched up Will's face and placed a kiss to his lips. Will blinked in shock, unsure of how to react to the sudden assault. Not assault. This was his wife. A kiss from his wife. But it wasn't Hannibal and that was such a bizarre notion to work through, the idea that he would prefer a kiss from a male serial killer over his own wife. Especially since Will had never thought of himself as gay, but he was so desperately in love with Hannibal that it made him question everything around him.

Will pushed Molly's hands from his face and helped her down from the table before moving over to Walter and helping him from his chair, blindfold still in place like instructed. He led both of them from the house and once outside, Will knelt down and removed Walter's blindfold and pulled the boy into a hug.

"The medics are going to check you over and make sure that you're alright. I need to help process this scene. I'll be with you as soon as I can," Will assured the boy. "I promise." Walter gave a nod against Will's shoulder and Will sighed. "You're a good boy, Walter. I love you."

"I love you too, dad," Walter whispered.

Will released him and rose to his feet, watching as the ambulances and police cars came from where they had been waiting, Jack Crawford stepping from the car before it had completely stopped moving.

"Is everyone out?" Jack demanded.

"Everyone's out," Will answered with a nod, trying to ignore the way that Molly clung to his side. "Let me get them to the medics and I'll come tell you what happened."

* * *

Hannibal had started a small fire in the fireplace that was nowhere near as large as the one in their previous cabin, but he found he didn't mind much. It gave off the heat and atmosphere that he wanted.

Both dogs were resting by the side of the couch that Hannibal lay across, book in hand, wine glass in the other, though his mind wasn't much focused on the lines of the book. There were only so many times he could reread the line, *Call me Ishmael* before his mind wandered and he had to restart.

No, his attention was better focused on his surroundings and the people lacking there in. Dinner had long gone cold at the dining table in the corner and the night continued to drag on. Hannibal had considered attempting to call Will's phone multiple times, but knew he had to resist. If the FBI was tracking his usage without a warrant, Hannibal wasn't about to risk it and see what else they were doing to Will's phone. He had also thought about going outside and trying to find Will, starting at the school Will had been teaching a class at. But he had also pushed the idea aside, not enjoying the new found anxiety that was wrapping itself around his mind.

There was the sound of a familiar car motor and tires on snow and ice and Hannibal closed the book, setting his wine aside on the coffee table. The two dogs both jumped up and raced to the front door, barking, but Hannibal stayed on the couch.

He listened intently as the front door opened and dragging footsteps entered the home before the door was closed and locked, the scent of burnt sage, copper and gunpowder strong in the air. The dogs fell silent and Hannibal could hear their tags jingling from being petted and then those footsteps again. Keys being thrown haphazardly, a coat crashing to the floor, something heavier in the fabric than what was normally in a coat. Something in the pocket.

Hannibal stayed silent, waiting for a rather profound answer to what had kept the empath so long, but there weren't any words, just a sharp inhale that was shaky. Hannibal glanced up and slowly rose to his feet as he took in a blood spattered Will who was trembling. Eyes looking up to stop the tears falling, lips bit between teeth. Tired, spent, worn, drained.

"Will?" Hannibal asked, voice sounding a little too loud for the space. He stepped over to Will and reached out hesitantly, taking Will's face in his hands, looking through blood covered glasses and into bloodshot blue eyes. "What happened?"

Will's knees gave out and Hannibal swiftly snatched up Will's crumbling body, scooping the empath up and into his arms, feet free from the ground. Will's arms wrapped around Hannibal's shoulders and Hannibal let Will cry into his shoulder.

Hannibal had seen Will cry many times. It wasn't unnatural for the man to let silent tears fall every now and then. Hannibal often found the empath's openness with emotion enduring, but he had never outright heard Will sob, shoulders shaking, fingers clinging to the fabric of Hannibal's shirt.

Hannibal moved for the stairs and started up them, clutching Will tightly against him. He used his foot to kick open the bathroom door and his elbow to flick on the light. He sat Will on the counter and pulled the glasses from Will's face, setting them aside on the counter.

"Hush, *meilė*," Hannibal whispered, hands pulling Will's face back up to look at him. "Look at me, *Mano meilė.* What happened? Speak to me, *mielasis*."

Will shook his head, letting Hannibal wipe away his tears. Hannibal didn't push Will any further. Will would tell him when Will was ready, definitely not before. And Will would tell him. He had always told Hannibal everything, even when he hadn't wanted to. Hannibal knew how to pull the words from him, but he was always gentle about it, letting Will work at his own pace unless the situation demanded a different outcome. But tonight it didn't. Tonight Hannibal had time and he would let Will come to him.

"Let's get you cleaned up." Hannibal released Will and went to the shower, opening the glass door and turning on the faucet until the water was a decent temperature. He moved back to Will who had lowered his head into his hands, curls hiding his face with how long they had become. "Will." Will looked up and Hannibal sighed at his tear stained cheeks. "Everything is alright. You're home and safe. I'm not going to let anything hurt you, alright?"

Will gave a small nod and let Hannibal undress him and lead him to the shower. Will stepped into the warm water and couldn't stop but snap again, a new set of tears mixing with the water. Hannibal watched as Will collapsed against the side of the shower and Hannibal reached into the water to help lower Will to the floor, ignoring the way his shirt sleeves were soaking wet.

Hannibal went and found a washcloth from the drawer by the sink and returned to the shower, wetting it and then adding soap to it until it was sudsy and then knelt down, reaching out for one of Will's blood splattered hands, tenderly scrubbing the dried brown from the empath's skin.

“I hate this,” Will whispered, calling Hannibal’s eyes from his work and to Will.

“I’m afraid you will have to be more specific,” Hannibal said as he focused his attention back to Will’s hand, working on trying to get the blood from the life lines in Will’s palm.

“I hate how good it feels to kill someone.”

Hannibal paused for a moment before he reached out for Will’s other hand, Hannibal’s shirt effectively soaked through nearly completely. Hannibal began scrubbing at the new hand in his grip. “Why? If it feels good, why deny yourself?”

“This isn’t splurging on expensive wine, Hannibal.” Will’s voice was sharp and Hannibal did his best to ignore the way it bit into him. “This is a human life.”

“You weren’t upset the other night when you killed Liam,” Hannibal reminded gently, leaning further into the shower and taking Will’s face and rubbing at it with the washcloth, cleaning the sweat, blood and grime from his skin.

“It was him or me and I wasn’t about to let it be me,” Will said, a little stronger now, though he still sounded like he was on the verge of tears. Hannibal stopped cleaning his face and Will turned his face to the water, using his now clean hands to wash the soap from his skin. “This was different.”

“Different how?” Hannibal questioned, rinsing out the washcloth and ringing it out before tossing it to the counter to be dealt with later.

“I didn’t have to kill him, but I did.”

“Was it him or you?”

“Yes,” Will answered with barely a whisper. “Him or my family.”

Hannibal froze at that, eyes now fully on Will’s face, lips in a frown. “He had your family?”

“My family was lucky number thirteen.” Will gave a choked laugh and shook his head, leaning it against the shower wall with closed eyes. Will didn’t need to say much more. Hannibal knew the case. He had read through Will’s notes that day out of boredom after having cleaned the car and burned everything that had needed to be burned. Had looked through a lot of Will’s case files that he was certain Will wasn’t supposed to have, most of them on himself, curious about first impressions of his killings. “Walter was in danger again, because of me.” There was another laugh.

“Will, you do not need to feel bad for protecting your family,” Hannibal offered out kindly, causing Will to open his eyes curiously. “This Witch Hunter obviously needed to be taken down. He wasn’t going to stop until you were dead.”

“He said that I was the reason my marriage fell apart and that I was a bad father.” Will looked like the words tasted bad in his mouth and Hannibal waited patiently for Will to continue on, head cocked to the side. “I can understand the marriage thing. I can. I haven’t been helping in any way, shape or form to keep my marriage together. But... Am I a bad father, Hannibal?”

Hannibal was taken aback by the question. He struggled to try to find the right words, for once unsure of how to answer. “I don’t think I can answer that in any way that will suffice your wants.”

“You could just say no,” Will grumbled with a frown, obviously offended.

“I do not think of you as a bad father to your child, Will,” Hannibal quickly corrected. “I am under the impression that you are doing the best with the circumstances that you have been given.”

Will gave a small nod and they sat in silence for a moment, just letting the water crash down around Will. Will inhaled deeply, mind scrambling through everything that had happened in the last few hours. Hours that he would relive to save all of those people, but hours that had taken Will away from Hannibal and Will knew the man must have been worried about him, sick with having to stay absolutely put with no option to help. But he could help now, even if the request was in such bad taste.

“Hannibal,” Will whispered, head resting back against the shower wall once more. “I need you to do something for me.”

“Anything.”

The answer was said outright, strong, bold. There was nothing hesitant in its nature. There for Will to grasp onto and use however he wanted, use Hannibal just as much as Hannibal used Will in their unhealthy game of tug of war.

“Even if this makes me seem like a horrible person.”

“Anything,” Hannibal repeated with a nod.

Will swallowed and licked at his lips. “Molly kissed me and... I can’t get the feeling off my lips.” Will’s hands clasped together and his fingers tangled and untangled nervously, though Hannibal didn’t make any movement or give off any air of being offended.

Hannibal took a moment to analyze the words that were provided and slowly he moved into the shower, clothes and all, on hands and knees. Will straightened out his legs to allow Hannibal to get closer to him and closed his eyes, head back against the shower wall, waiting for Hannibal to give him what he asked for.

It was sick. It was wrong the way that Will wanted to scrub Molly’s love from his lips until his lips were bleeding. It was awful that he had fallen so far under this killer’s spell that he would let himself be swallowed by the man. And Beverly had been right. Will was just an admiring and obedient little player in the world that Hannibal had strung together like a carefully crafted spider’s web. But Hannibal was just as tangled in Will’s own web, each doomed to each other from the moment they had been shoved into the same office together. Each one the poison in the other’s cup that would kill both of them, but they would drink willingly if it meant being together until the end of time.

Hannibal pressed his lips to Will’s and let himself fully take in the way that Will inhaled sharply, body moving on its own, Will’s hands reaching up to grasp at any part of Hannibal they could reach. One hand fisted into Hannibal’s wet shirt, the other in Hannibal’s dripping hair, pulling Hannibal closer as he kissed back.

A needy little thing. A greedy boy. So demanding. So spoiled. And Hannibal knew it was his fault, knew he gave in too readily to this boy, this God sent joy. But he couldn’t say no. The world was Will’s. The moon was Will’s. The sun, the stars, anything and everything was Will’s. Hannibal was Will’s. Would forever be stamped as Will’s, longing for the touch of burning summer heat against his wintery frozen skin.

There was a sharp push against Hannibal’s chest from Will’s fist and Hannibal fell backwards, unbalanced. His back was shoved up against the opposite wall of the shower and Will climbed on top of him, kissing him intently as if he had been deprived of touch for millennia.

Hannibal’s fingers trailed over Will’s bareback, tracing each of the bite marks that he had left there in a desperate need to mark Will as his, something that showed the whole world that Will Graham was his and his alone. Because Hannibal could be greedy too. Hannibal could be needy and demanding and spoiled. Hannibal always got what he wanted and it wasn’t about to stop now.

Will pulled back with a yawn, back of his hand going to cover his mouth. Hannibal smiled and his hands cradled either side of Will’s face, pulling him back in to kiss him softly, slowly.

“Let’s get you into bed,” Hannibal said against Will’s lips before kissing him once more. “I’ll read to you.”

“Mmm...” Will hummed, letting himself be kissed once more, Molly so far removed from his mind now, Hannibal the only thing there for Will to focus on. “You made dinner.”

“I doubt it will be good anymore.”

“You’re cooking is always good, Hannibal. Even if it’s cold.”

Ukochany: Beloved

P rzykro mi. Nie mogę: I'm sorry. I can not.

meilė: Love

mano meilė: my love

mielasis: Darling

Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

> Will gave a snort of laughter. “Hanni?” he asked, receiving a cold glare from Hannibal. “I don’t even think you would bother cooking me if I called you that.”

Chapter Notes

> Very happy birthday to Wintrchild!

LOSING YOU
TERRIFIES
ME

“You tampered with evidence?” Hannibal asked as he picked up Will’s coat from the night before that had been thrown unceremoniously to the floor. It had been oddly heavy and Hannibal had emptied the contents of the pockets to find an evidence bag with a loaded magazine.

“To protect us,” Will muttered around the cup of coffee that was at his lips. “If they can place me at that crime scene, they’re going to know I remember you and know where you are.”

Hannibal looked over the magazine thoughtfully, trying to take in the empath’s meaning behind it, unsure if he should be proud or not. He was relieved that his earlier worry of being turned over to the authorities had been only that, a worry.

But now Will was changing, morphing, becoming. He was becoming something that Hannibal always knew he could be, becoming something Hannibal had awakened in the man. But at the same time, as exciting as that was, Hannibal loved Will just as Will had always been. The empath who felt far too much and tried to help even if it shattered him into pieces. Hannibal didn't want to lose that part of Will to whatever path Will was taking now, but he would follow Will to the ends of the earth. After all, everyone changed. No one was ever the same person they were a month ago and it was Hannibal's job to accept the changes and love every version of this man, not just the version he had fallen in love with.

"You don't seem pleased," Will's voice called, pulling Hannibal from somewhere deep in the back of his mind.

"I didn't say that," Hannibal contradicted, hanging up the coat and bringing the scrunched up photo and evidence bag to the dining table that Will sat at, feet up on the chair across from him, coffee mug in hand and looking out at the sliding glass door to the backyard where the dogs were. Hannibal set the items on the table in front of Will. "I am just concerned for your wellbeing is all."

Will smiled. "My wellbeing? My wellbeing was shoved out of a window the moment I decided I was in love with you."

"And when was that moment, Will?"

Hannibal picked up his own mug that Will had poured for him and took a sip, waiting for Will's face to return from the thoughtful frown it had dove into.

"The first time I felt something for you was when you saved that man in the ambulance. Seeing you so willing to protect..." Will trailed off, leaving the sentence unfinished. "But I realized I loved you that night I called you," Will answered softly, grip tightening on the cup. "I wasn't decided. Not until I heard your voice and told you to run."

Hannibal stood still, in contemplation, a hint of regret digging through his veins like daggers in his blood. Had he read the situation wrong? He had been the happiest in his life he had ever been until the moment he smelt Freddie Louds on Will. Had been so blissfully unaware up to that moment and then everything shattered, crashed down around him. And maybe that had blinded him to Will's true feelings. Will wouldn't have warned him if he didn't care. It was a bitter pill to take, but one Hannibal could readily accept. He was not above accepting his flaws. He had been wrong.

"I'm sorry."

Will coughed on his sip of coffee and sputtered, hand going to his mouth as he sat up, feet now on the floor. "What?" he asked, looking up at Hannibal.

"I was wrong," Hannibal said with a small nod, though he didn't dare look at Will. No, he kept his eyes firmly outside on the rising sun. He couldn't look at Will's expression. He didn't want to see the pain there, didn't want to know what Will was thinking. "I reacted poorly and took many things from you that night. I'm sorry."

Out of his peripherals, Hannibal could see Will rise to his feet, but he still kept his eyes trained outside. Out on the misty winter morning. Out on the snow that was frozen to ice and no longer a gentle powder from the last snowfall.

"You mean that?" Will's voice asked beside him.

Hannibal gave a small nod, feeling Will's fingers sink into the fabric of his shirt at his hip. A tug on the fabric finally called Hannibal's eyes to meet his Van Gogh painting.

“Tell me you mean it,” Will instructed. “There aren’t marbles in your head. I can’t hear you nod.”

Hannibal’s lips twitched up into a smile as his words were shot back at him. “I mean it. I’m sorry I stole so much from you.” Hannibal reached out a hand and caressed Will’s cheek. “It was wrong of me.”

Will pushed himself up on his toes and planted a swift kiss to Hannibal’s lips. “Thank you.”

* * *

“Where are you going?” Hannibal asked one morning as Will came down the stairs, fully dressed and keys in hand, bypassing the breakfast that Hannibal had set out. Not that it was an impressive spread, oatmeal and fruit, the kitchen being quite bare once more, Will’s shopping habits having not improved in the slightest over the last few weeks. “Your classes aren’t until later.”

“Canceled,” Will stated, grabbing his coat from where he had left it on the back of the couch the night before.

“Then come eat before you go rushing off,” Hannibal instructed, moving over to Will and taking Will’s hand. Will gave a small sigh and a nod, letting himself be pulled to the table. Will still wasn’t used to the constant care from Hannibal. He had always skipped breakfast and lunch, usually eating dinner when he got home. He was sure that Hannibal had been this accommodating when they had been alone for three months as well, but what he could remember of those three months was a blurry, drug induced haze. “Where are you going?”

Will dug his spoon into the oatmeal and took a bite that had been stained almost a purple color from a blueberry. “Alana’s,” Will answered before taking a gulp of coffee that was still a little too hot.

“Why?”

“To check on Morgan.” Will took another hurried bite, not noticing the odd look that had plastered itself over Hannibal’s face. “It’s the least I can do for her. She did validate my alibi for Jack. I can check in on the kid.”

“I want to come.”

Will finally looked up from the food he was ungracefully shoving into his body. “Hannibal-”

“I need to see the child,” Hannibal insisted, voice firm and determined.

“We’ve talked about this. You know that you’re not supposed to leave-”

“Will,” Hannibal said.

There was something in Hannibal’s tone that made Will come to the realization that Hannibal almost never asked for anything from him. Will bit his tongue, wondering if the word was said deliberately, if Hannibal knew exactly how to shape and level his voice so that the melody of it fell somewhere between wistful petition and a very clear demand.

Will closed his eyes and exhaled deeply. This was the first thing that Hannibal had asked for since he had stayed, other than Will to pick up some more expensive produce so that Hannibal wasn’t reduced to cooking from cans.

A hand took his and pulled it away from his face so he could see Hannibal’s.

“Please,” Hannibal whispered.

It was nice to have the Witch Hunter’s case behind them. Freddie Lounds had written her fill, still knowing far more information than she should have, but Jack didn’t really care much anymore. As long as she stayed out of the way.

Closing up this case and processing the bodies had put their other case on hold. Hannibal had been quiet since this last spree and Jack found he had to focus more on closing up one case than working on one that had been open for years. It wasn’t until Zeller burst into his office with a frantic expression and Price hurrying in shortly after that Jack knew just how badly he was needed back on the Chesapeake Ripper case.

“It’s gone,” Zeller said, out of breath from having run from the lab and to Jack’s office.

“What’s gone?” Jack asked as he sat forward in his chair, hands folded on his desktop.

“All of the pictures we took of Hall Mansion,” Price answered, just as out of breath as Zeller.

“What do you mean they’re gone?” Jack demanded.

“They’re not on any computers, they aren’t on the cameras, some of the evidence is missing,” Zeller pressed on, hands on his hips under his lab coat, a deep seated fear pulsing through his veins. He knew what this meant, what all of it meant. They were in deep shit. “We have it documented in the reports what was found, but it’s not in the evidence locker.”

“We tried to pull things from the hard drives and pull up backups of our files but there’s nothing,” Price said, ready for Jack’s explosion. “Nowhere.”

“What about security footage? There has to be something on there? Everything is recorded,” Jack pointed out, looking between the two men.

“The footage is recorded over every 48 hours,” Zeller explained with a pained expression.

“You would think that the FBI would hold onto all of their footage,” Price said with a scolding tone to his voice like a parent who was upset with a child. “They should know better.”

“So, someone has deleted everything and stolen from the evidence lockers without being noticed.” Jack rose to his feet and stepped around his desk, hands in his pockets. “Someone obviously connected with the Ripper case. Someone who would have to have clearance to get in.”

“Or know how to sneak in,” Price offered, receiving a dark look from Jack.

Zeller groaned, head thrown back. “No,” he said sharply. “It wasn’t Will. Stop trying to peg everything on him.”

“He fits. He obviously hasn’t been telling the whole truth about what happened at Hall Mansion.” Jack leaned back against his desk. “He knows more than he’s telling us.”

“Will has an alibi for that night,” Price reminded, looking between Jack and Zeller. “Or are we forgetting that he spent all night in the ER with Dr. Bloom? His name was on the registry. The staff verified that he was there.”

“Dr. Bloom has come into a lot of money.”

“She did not pay off the medical staff, Jack,” Zeller argued, arms folding over his chest. “Why on earth would she have needed to?”

“To hide what really happened to her son, possibly,” Jack answered with a shrug.

“Her son tripped into their pond and almost drowned,” Price pushed. “Dr. Bloom would never hurt her own child. And neither would the Verger girl.”

“Then why was he at an ER twenty minutes from their home?”

“He got transferred!” Zeller said exasperatedly. “Jack. All of these things happened. They have paper trails that prove they happened. Stop trying to pin things on people when they couldn’t have been anywhere else.”

* * *

“Will,” Margot greeted, giving Will a hug as he stepped inside of the house. “Dr. Lecter.” The name was not said kindly, though she didn’t argue to find the man back inside of her home. She knew exactly what he had done for her, that they were even and she was grateful, she had just hoped that that night would have been the last she would have had to see the man before her. “I don’t believe I ever told you thank you.”

Margot turned away from the two and led them through the large house and up a flight of stairs that Will had never been on before.

“You’re welcome,” Hannibal replied simply, not asking for anything more to be said about his sacrifice.

“My son is still currently in his lesson. It should be done in a few minutes if you don’t mind waiting,” Margot continued, motioning to a door. “You can go in, just please don’t disrupt.”

Will glanced over at Hannibal, an awkwardness in his limbs at being allowed into a classroom for a child that he honestly didn’t know very well. But Hannibal didn’t need any further permission. He reached for the door handle, pushed the door open and let himself inside, Will following behind.

Hannibal closed the door quietly and both stayed by the door, seeing a small boy in a desk with a book open in front of him. A woman who had blonde hair remarkably as light as Bedelia’s was standing at the front of the room, a chalk board in front of her with words written on it in a language that Will didn’t know.

“*Sie können nicht, wenn Sie es nicht fühlen können, wenn es nie ist erhebt sich aus der seele und schwankt das Herz eines jeden Hörers, Mit tiefster Kraft auf einfache Weise*,” Morgan read aloud, the blonde woman nodding.

“The Vergers work closely with the German markets,” Hannibal explained softly to Will who stood in a stunned silence over the boy’s fluent reading of the language. “It is important for him to learn the business early so he can carry it on.”

“What is he reading?” Will asked just as softly.

“Faust.” Hannibal moved a little closer to Will. “You’ll sit forever, gluing things together, cooking up a stew from other’s scraps, blowing on a miserable fire, made from your heap of dying ash," Hannibal translation for Will. “Let apes and children praise your art, if their admiration’s to your taste, but you’ll never speak from heart to heart, unless it rises up from your heart’s space.”

“It’s beautiful. I’m assuming it’s a classic that my school system failed to teach me,” Will muttered with a small smile.

“Quite so,” Hannibal agreed with a small nod. “But you aren’t a Verger heir, so I doubt you will need to trouble yourself with such dictations.”

“Will you read it to me someday?”

“If you so wish.”

“Hanni?” a new voice asked, causing Will to glance down at the small child who had finished his assignment and had raced over to them.

Will looked between Hannibal and Morgan and gave a snort of laughter. “Hanni?” he asked, receiving a cold glare from Hannibal. “I don’t even think you would bother cooking me if I called you that.”

“Hush,” Hannibal instructed before kneeling down to Morgan’s height. “Hello Morgan. How are you feeling today?”

Will fell silent as he took in the man before him beside the small child, Hannibal making it so the two of them were equal, not one of them better than the other. Voice kind, but not talking down to Morgan. Morgan was as good as any other adult that Hannibal could speak to and would be treated as such. The boy had somehow earned it.

Morgan smiled. “Dr. Nepp said that-said that I’m perfectly fine.”

“Good,” Hannibal said with a nod. “Do you remember anything?”

Morgan’s face scrunched up in thought. “Not much. I remember being taken and Dr. Jefferies telling me to be quiet. And I remember this really tall building, but not much else.”

Will watched as Hannibal’s hand reached out and petted at the boy’s head with a sigh. “Good.” It was good. The boy would be fine and he didn’t need to remember the traumatic. Will was certain that the boy wouldn’t miss the memories like he did. Will craved to remember the traumatic, but he couldn’t exactly bring himself to indulge in said cravings. “I’m glad you’re doing so well.”

“Do you remember, Will?” the young boy asked, making Will bite his lips. “Hanni said that you have been having a hard time remembering things. Like you didn’t remember him.”

“I remember him,” Will said, lowering himself to the floor as well, feeling awkward in the fake idea that he was above the conversion. “I remember him very well.”

“That’s good,” Morgan said with a bright smile, one undamaged by the harshness of the world. “Hanni was sad that you didn’t.”

“He was, was he?” Will asked, voice soft as he glanced at Hannibal who surprisingly had a small rosy color come to his cheeks.

“Wouldn’t leave his bed for nearly a week,” Morgan continued, clasping his hands behind his back and rising onto the balls of his feet before falling back down. “Dr. Jefferies said he was depressed.”

Will reached out and carefully pushed a lock of hair behind Hannibal’s ear, the man staying deathly quiet, barely breathing as his secrets were spilled out for the world to hear. Not the world, but his world.

“Because of me?” Will asked softly, eyes not leaving Hannibal’s still face, hoping to catch any emotions that flickered across it under the flush of his skin.

“Always you,” Hannibal whispered, voice sounding sticky from his throat, though he didn’t look over at Will.

“Hanni, can we go look at the horses? Please?” Morgan snatched up Hannibal’s hand and pulled on it, though he didn’t have the strength to budge Hannibal. “Will can come too. He’ll like Persephone.”

“I’m sure he would,” Hannibal agreed. “Let us check with your mothers first to make sure you don’t have any other classes to attend to.”

“Your professional opinion?” Alana asked as she came to stand beside Hannibal. Both of them looked towards the other end of the stable where Margot, Morgan and Will were all by Persephone, a dappled grey coat that looked nearly blue. Hannibal stared over the small unit of people nearly curious if this would have been Will’s family if Mason hadn’t stolen Will’s child from Margot.

“I don’t think there’s anything wrong with the boy,” Hannibal answered, hands shoved deep into his coat pockets. “Thank you, by the way.”

“For what?” Alana questioned, looking over Hannibal’s face, taking in every detail of the man who didn’t look nearly as sinister as he had in the past. Mellowed out now, perhaps a bit. Calmed and tamed by an unstable man across the way.

“Being Will’s alibi.”

Alana sighed with a small nod. “I can’t very well be in debt to you, Hannibal. I don’t want you to come collecting.”

Hannibal licked at his lip, holding down a chuckle as a horse nipped at Will and Will jumped, a horse much bigger than a dog. “I won’t darken your doorstep again for what I hope is a very long time,” Hannibal agreed. “I just had to make sure the boy was alright. And he is. His mental functions are all there, physically capable. I think you got him to the hospital just in time.”

“You got him to the hospital in time.” Alana came to stand in front of Hannibal and Hannibal glanced down at the dark haired woman. “I don’t think I will ever come close to being able to understand how your mind works, not even after all of that time together in the state hospital. But...” Alana glanced behind her at some laughter and could see Will helping Morgan back to his feet, the child having fallen to the ground somehow. “How do you pick?”

“Pick?” Hannibal echoed.

“Pick,” Alana answered with a nod. “How do you decide who to save and who to kill? Why didn’t you let my boy die? Why haven’t you killed me yet? How do you pick?”

“I don’t even know if dear Will knows the answer to that fully either,” Hannibal mused. “I suppose it has to do with opportunity, the situations presented and how people hold themselves in those situations.”

“You don’t know yourself?” Alana frowned and blinked as she tried to make sense of the answer.

“It is not something that I can put into words. The psychology behind my reasoning would take more than a single session to dive into and you are not my attending physician, I am afraid.”

But the answer wasn’t truly all that complicated, or at least not as complicated as he made it sound. He really had been telling the truth when he had told Will he ate the rude. Ever since Hannibal had been a young child he had equated love with destruction and distance.

His parents had loved him, and while they had never been abusive, they had been distant. Cautiously distant from their children and cautiously isolating of the children so much so that Mischa was Hannibal’s only friend. Unfortunately, Hannibal had never had a moment to ask his family why the distance was so needed when he and Mischa were perfectly happy being close.

And when Mischa died, fed to a starving Hannibal in a cold dead winter, Hannibal found the destruction in the love, promising that his sister’s murder and consumption wouldn’t be senseless. She was slaughtered by starving kidnappers, but Hannibal would have traded his life to save hers. He would have willingly believed, only the way a young child could, that once he was dead they would let his sister go and she could live on.

He was never given the option though. Separated in the night and if Hannibal had known that she was taken from him, he would have fought fiercely for her. Instead, it wasn’t until he was eating the soup that had so magically appeared that he realized what or rather who was in it. It wasn’t until he saw her red hair ribbon, his favorite color because of how it blended with her hair just so, slowly burning at the edge of a barely lit fire, that he knew she no longer needed it.

It was then that he dedicated his life to her so his betrayal of her would cut so deeply. Why hadn’t he asked where the soup had come from? Why hadn’t he insisted on knowing where his sister was when he was rudely awoken from a cold and shivering sleep? Whatever the reasons, they didn’t matter anymore. It was too late now.

To avoid hating himself and throwing himself into his own destruction and reject Mischa’s sacrifice, he began to identify love with destruction. To use a man’s death to fuel another man’s life had to be love, didn’t it? Mischa had died and allowed Hannibal to live, even if it hadn’t been her choice. Hannibal had allowed his love for Mischa to be reborn and for Mischa’s sacrifice to be renewed each time he turned another being into a meal.

If God could cause a church roof to collapse on his worshipers and not be considered evil, then Hannibal could cause some destruction on not nearly as large of a scale to less savory people and could not be found any more evil than God.

So, all in all it wasn’t too complicated, and his ideas of love being the same or equal to destruction had led to his courting of Will and the misunderstanding of what his actions meant. But at least now Will understood. And that was the only person who Hannibal cared to be understood by.

“Shame we didn’t have more time to ourselves for me to pick your brain a little more,” Alana said, turning back to face her family and Will. “Be careful who you hold onto, Hannibal.”

“Hmm?” he asked, curious as to what Alana was referring to.

“My son is my weakness. Will is going to be yours if he isn’t already.”

“Will is not my weakness,” Hannibal stated strongly, definitely, mouth turned down in a scowl.

“I see the way you look at him, Hannibal,” Alana continued in a voice that Hannibal had come to know well. A distant observation. “You can’t hide your emotions in your eyes like you used to. He’s broken down that wall you so carefully built. The one I couldn’t get behind.”

“No one is allowed behind my wall.”

“No one but Will Graham.”

* * *

Blood was normally such a comfort in its heat. Something life bearing. Something that he could control. The red was like liquid rubies in firelight as it rained to the floor, smashing apart in beads like a bottle of merlot.

And the way that blood would shine against skin that took on the paleness of the moon was usually so breathtaking. A vast contrast that was like a rose blooming in the snow. So much harshness crashing together to create beauty.

And the sounds were like Handel played with instruments that had taken the time to be tuned from an A440 down to A415. Melodies played without the added flirtation of an overstated vibrato. There didn’t need to be a vibrato when the sounds were so organic on their own, perfect in their own right.

But Will’s sounds were not an overture of hooked bowings praising the Messiah. They were nails on a chalkboard, a fork scraping a plate, two pieces of Styrofoam being rubbed together. And Will’s skin was not the ghostly milk of lunar rays. It was the shattered face of a clock, broken china, a white feather tarnished by an oil spill. And his blood was not rare jewels to be held onto. It was a red shirt that got mixed in with the whites in the wash, a bucket of paint that had spilled over newly laid carpet, coffee dumped onto a laptop.

Will’s death was not art. Not the art it was meant to be.

Because Will wasn’t meant to die. There was no reason for his death other than the intense rage that controlled his hands. The rage built up after so many hopeless attempts at getting the man to remember.

But Will never did remember. He was as good as ash being blown through the smoky air after a fire. Something that was once something else, but nothing that someone could get back, licked by flames.

He had tried everything to get his memories to come back. He had killed and kissed and destroyed and loved. Nothing, absolutely nothing, worked. And this act, this crime of passion, was his breaking point. He snapped. Snapped so hard that his hands moved without his wishes, the caged beast breaking from its carefully crafted chains.

And here was Will Graham, his beloved Will Graham, beautiful empath, silly boy, gasping on the ground. Eyes sparkling through the immense pain in them. That blue that was a color no artist could ever match; no mixture of paint would ever compare to that blue. That tragic blue.

All he wanted was to be remembered. And he didn't need the medical or academic community to remember him. He didn't need Chilton's book or Freddie's tabloids. He didn't need his published works hung in a museum. All he wanted was to be remembered by Will Graham.

Will Graham needed to remember him. He had to. Will Graham was the only one who had ever seen him fully, accepted him as he was. Monster, god, devil or something in between them all.

And that knife that glittered like a Christmas ornament of polished silver just continued to drag down and down and down until it ran out of flesh to carve through. Gasping, gurgling, choking on blood, light fading away from those blue eyes.

"I could never forget you, Hannibal."

The words echo around like he's trapped inside of a cave. His hands shake as they desperately try to undo what he's done. Blood not the normal heat, instead it's ice cold as his hands try to close the deep wound down the very center of Will's torso. A gash from the dip in his clavicle all the way to the waistline of his pants.

He begs the skin to heal itself. Begs the blood to stop flowing. Begs for the light to return to those eyes that made his sky colorful, for breath to return to those lungs, for life to return to the bones that will turn to dust without it.

Because Will remembered. Called him by name. But Will is not there anymore. And he knows it's all his fault. If he just held on longer. Just waited. Was more patient with Will. Gave Will the world like he promised instead of taking away his own world from himself in an unconscious self-sabotage.

"Come back."

The room was dark when Hannibal woke. His breathing was frantic, heart erratic and he couldn't remember the last time his body didn't stay calm and under his control when he wanted it to.

His shaking hands reached out beside him and when he found the bed empty, his heart sank. He sat up and didn't bother to grab for anything as he left the room in search of Will, afraid of what he'd find.

The dream had been so real, and Hannibal had relived murders in his dreams before, he almost didn't want to look for Will. Will could be laying across the glass of a shattered coffee table with blood cradling him, his curls a halo around his head, framing his pale face and dead blue eyes.

Hannibal hit the last stair and turned into the living room to find a fire crackling in the inept fireplace and a curly haired man on the couch with a glass of whiskey in hand, lost in thought.

Will's eyes jumped from the fire to the footsteps and he gave a concerned look, setting the glass aside and getting to his feet. "Hannibal? Are you alright?"

Hannibal stared at the man who stood before him, whole, alive, heart beating, head remembering, blood free. But that didn’t stop the dryness in Hannibal’s mouth and the twitching in his fingers.

Hannibal stepped closer to Will and his hands searched over Will’s skin, pulling at the collar of the man’s t-shirt to see the dip in his clavicle. No marks there. And his hands quickly dipped under Will’s shirt, tugging at it as he dropped to his knees.

“Hannibal?” Will asked once more, fingers finding their way through tangled silver locks.

Hannibal’s fingers and eyes flickered over Will’s torso, tracing every scar that was there, none of them straight down his center. Hannibal let out a deep breath and rested his head against Will’s stomach, hands clutching the man’s hips tightly. Will shifted uncomfortably at the bruising grip but didn’t say anything. Just let Hannibal be, gently petting at his hair.

Will’s fingers dipped a little lower, finding Hannibal’s pulse and he frowned. He had never known it to race. His pulse was always a steady beat, only rising if he put forth physical effort into something.

“Couldn’t sleep either?” Will asked softly after another moment of silence. Hannibal gave a small nod against Will’s body, still breathing hard and broken.

"Your diagnosis?" he asked through a dry mouth, inhaling as deeply as he could of Will’s scent. He smelt just as he had that night. Petrichor, earthy, strong. That same night that mirrored this very conversation, though Hannibal hadn't been nearly as worked up over the dream.

"Nightmares." Will's tone was solid. "The question is..." Will’s hands took Hannibal’s face and pushed Hannibal back so that Will could lower himself to the floor as well to be the same height as Hannibal. "What do you have to be afraid of?” Hannibal gave a small, amused huff of air, face in a frown. "Do I have to guess?"

Hannibal licked his lips, thinking over the responses in his mind before deciding on one. He shook his head and met Will's eyes, with a small, "No."

"Then humor me," Will said, the back of his fingers gently caressing one of Hannibal’s sharp cheeks. "What do you have to be afraid of?"

"You."

The answer was simple and hung in the air as Will tried to take it in. Will inhaled deeply and gave a small scoff, a nervous smile on his lips, but Hannibal didn't return the expression.

"I'm nothing to be afraid of," Will threw out with a shake of his head. "You can't be serious."

"Deathly."

The smile slipped from Will's mouth and his eyes once more searched the normally so well put together man before him. Same grey well cut hair, clean shaven face, impeccable clothing, even if it was just evening wear.

"Why me?" Will gasped out, breath heavy as he tried to find the answer in the unreadable expression on Hannibal's face, blue eyes flickering about.

Hannibal looked over Will in silence a moment longer, wishing that his body would listen to him and stop being locked in panic, one that still had his hands trembling as he reached up and took Will's wrists, Will's hands still at his face.

"Losing you terrifies me," Hannibal replied in barely more than a whisper. "And losing you by my own careless hands is worse."

"You're not going to lose me," Will assured, dragging Hannibal closer. Hannibal blinked as he was tugged against Will's chest as Will sat fully on the ground, back against the couch. Hannibal let himself be guided until he was laying with his head in Will's lap, one hand's fingers tangled with his, the other empath's fingers playing with his hair. Hannibal inhaled deeply, closing his eyes on the exhale and relaxed into Will's hold. "I'm here for you, through the blood and sugar. Forever and always."

"Don't forget me," Hannibal whispered, words raspy as they came from his mouth. He licked at his lips, trying to wet them, but it did nothing to help.

"Never."

Hannibal shook his head at the ridiculousness of his request. It was absurd and he shouldn't expect a truthful answer from Will. "I don't want you to forget me."

"I promise," Will whispered, his hand leaving Hannibal's hair to pick up his drink so he could have a sip.

"That's a lie."

Will set his glass back down and looked curiously over Hannibal's pained face, fingers pressing into the lines in Hannibal's face to smooth them out. "It's not a lie."

"You can't promise that," Hannibal argued back, though his eyes stayed closed and he didn't move. Will sighed, fingers still working on Hannibal's face that was slowly relaxing under Will's touch.

"Have you not realized that even when I don't know you, I still remember you?" Will asked with an exasperated sigh that made Hannibal's maroon eyes open curiously. "You are a plague in my system, the fever in my lungs. I dream about you, I can't stop thinking about you. I might not know your name or your face, but you're there. You're constantly all I can focus on." Hannibal was quiet, listening to Will's rant as Will looked at the fire, seeming unable to meet Hannibal's gaze. "I search for you." Will licked at his bottom lip before pulling it between his teeth, his hand returning to Hannibal's hair, taking a handful of it and holding it tightly as if Hannibal were smoke and was going to blow away. "I couldn't let you go. I will always search for you, Hannibal. You don't need to be afraid of me forgetting. You don't have to be worried over my mind. It might be shattered and broken but you are etched into every piece of it. You must be out of your mind if you think I can keep you out of mine."

Hannibal gasped as Will leaned over and placed a harsh kiss against Hannibal's lips, knees curling up to make Hannibal an easier reach. His fingers tugged carelessly at Hannibal's hair, kiss inelegantly hot and wet, teeth sharp as they latched onto Hannibal's bottom lip.

* * *

"Jack," Will groaned through a mouthful of food as several folders were thrown onto his desk. "I'm in the middle of lunch. I don't want to think about my next class, much less over this case right now.”

“Evidence has gone missing and has been deleted from our systems,” Jack explained, pointing at the files. “Someone has access to this case and it, for once, isn’t Freddie Lounds.”

Will frowned and lowered his fork back into his tupperware dish, chewing slowly on what was still in his mouth. “Do you know what’s missing?” Will asked, a hand reaching out and taking one of the folders, flipping it open.

“A gun magazine. We’re still checking through everything else. Reports mention it being found, but it’s not in the evidence locker and we have no pictures to prove that it was there.”

“No pictures?” Will questioned, flipping through the reports, trying to look like he was interested. He took another bite of his lunch and became suddenly very aware of Jack staring at him.

“Someone has gone through and deleted all of the photos of the crime scene that were taken. The cards for the cameras are missing. Everything that wasn’t printed out was deleted from our systems. We’ve tried to find backups, but everything is erased from the hard drives,” Jack explained.

Will gave a small nod and took another bite of his lunch, pulling the file closer to him to look over. After a moment of silence, Will took another one of the folders and flipped it open. “Did the magazine belong to any of the guns that were found?” Will asked around another mouthful.

“What are you eating?”

“Lunch,” Will grumbled, looking up at Jack over the rim of his glasses. Jack tapped his fingers on the desktop and Will sighed. “A French lamb stew called lamb shank navarin or something to that effect, if you must know. I don’t see why it matters.”

“Did you buy it?” Jack asked and watched carefully as Will lowered his fork and sat back in his chair, in thought. Interesting.

“No,” Will finally settled on.

“Did you make it?”

“No,” Will repeated, truth in his words, though they were annoyed. “First you interrupt my lunch and then you judge me on what I brought to eat. Do you want me to look over this case for you or not?”

“Where did you get it?” Jack pushed.

Will frowned and quickly began picking up his lunch, shoving the closed tupperware back into his bag and getting to his feet. “A neighbor brought it by the other night when I came home late from the Witch Hunter’s crime scene. She was taking care of my dogs for me. I kept it in the freezer until now. Happy? Or would you like me to share? I can call her and get you the recipe if my food is so interesting to you.”

Jack didn’t say a word further about the food and Will must have satisfied the man. “Tell me who deleted all of our information,” Jack instructed instead, voice impatient.

“They would have to be an employee,” Will offered, slowly lowering himself back into his chair at his desk and opening the last file. “Or at least someone with access to FBI facilities.”

"Like you."

"Like me," Will agreed with a single nod, licking his lips. Had he already been caught? Jack wasn't stupid, but Will had hoped that Jack's normal blindness and stubbornness would allow Will more time to take care of everything that he needed to. He had slowly been removing evidence of himself from Hall Mansion, carefully, a little at a time. "Do you think it was me, Jack?" He had to know, be certain. He had to make sure that Jack wasn't baiting him because Jack was a good fisherman.

"No," Jack answered with a scrunched nose and a shake of his head, fingers tapping on the desktop once more. "Because we would have all of your badge logins of you entering the building and you haven't been in the lab since I took you there."

Will knew well enough how to piggyback on someone else's badge. It wasn't a difficult thing to pull off and he was more than aware of the security tapes recording over previous footage after 48 hours. As long as he wasn't noticed within those 48 hours and he didn't leave any other evidence behind him, then he was safe. Jack couldn't prove anything.

"So, has there been any suspicious badge activity then?" Will pushed, trying to once again look busy with the case files that Jack had basically thrown at him.

"None that we have been able to find."

Will gave a nod. "So, they use someone else's badge. Someone who enters the building regularly, or irregularly, as you do. Has anyone's badge gone missing?"

"Nothing reported," Jack replied.

"Punishment is harsh for a lost badge, Jack. Maybe start there."

Jack gave a nod and pulled the file from Will's hand, scooping up the other two as well, leaving Will with a confused look. "Your neighbor is nearly 80 years old," Jack stated strongly. "She stopped taking care of your dogs because of her age. I remember you telling me about how Walter was going to have to start taking care of the dogs. An 80 year old woman with arthritis in both knees is not going to spend all day in the kitchen making a French lamb stew. And we both know that your cooking is as good as my mother's Oriental Noodles."

Will bit his tongue but didn't say a word, just stared Jack down, challenging him to keep talking, daring Jack to say exactly what was on his mind. Jack turned as the classroom door opened, signaling the end of Will's lunch prep and his next class beginning.

"Is Dr. Lecter's cooking still as good as it was all those years ago?" Jack called over his shoulder, pushing through the students and leaving the classroom and Will with a dry mouth, heart pounding.

Sie können nicht, wenn Sie es nicht fühlen können, wenn es nie ist erhebt sich aus der seele und schwankt das Herz eines jeden Hörers, Mit tiefster Kraft auf einfache Weise: You cannot, if you cannot feel it, if it never is rises from the soul and wavers the heart of every listener, With the deepest strength in a simple manner.

Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

> “Do not tell me what to do,” Will hissed, hands now fists. Blue eyes were aflame and Hannibal watched him with a curious glint to his own eyes, head tipped up, showing he was fully invested in Will now. “What was so interesting about the book?”
>
> “The Song of Achilles,” Hannibal replied. “An erotic retelling of the Iliad.”
>
> Will’s eyes narrowed. “You’re reading gay porn about Greek Gods?”
>
> “Your wife owns gay porn about the Greek Gods. Surely you wouldn’t buy something of the sort.”

Chapter Notes

> Guys, you were all so wonderful about the last chapter that I need to post this one. It's a big chapter. Jeeze. I am going crazy because I'm so excited about what the next few chapters are going to set up for the sequel I am planning on writing and have already started. And everyone was begging for a new chapter, so here! Yay!
>
> Also in this chapter there's a lot of other languages and the conversation is a bit more important, so I put the translations beside what is being said, but I'll probably go back to adding everything to the end of the chapters in the next ones unless there's more important things like this.
>
> Thanks a lot! I hope you enjoy!

LOSING
YOU
TERRIFIES
ME

Hannibal was a little thrown off as the front door was slammed shut and a frantic looking Will stomped in and past the two dogs that raced to him. Hannibal tilted his head to the side, placing his pencil down on his sketch, meeting eyes hidden behind the shine of glasses.

“There hasn’t been anything weird around here, has there?” Will asked, out of breath, hand motioning around the room, his other hand taking the dining table for balance. “You’ve been keeping the curtains drawn and most of the lights off, right? You haven’t been going outside longer than to let the dogs out?”

“I have not done anything that has gone against the rules we set in place,” Hannibal agreed with a small nod, his hands folded on the table.

Will licked his lips with a nod, a hand going into his hair. “And you haven’t seen anyone lurking around?”

“Lurking?” Hannibal asked, brows furrowed. “As in...?”

“Jack Crawford or Zeller or Price or anyone from the FBI,” Will threw out, voice frazzled, hands up in the air. “I-I don’t know. Anyone?”

“Not that I have noticed,” Hannibal said slowly, glancing around the room as if there would magically appear the person who Will was speaking of. “It is very silent here during the day. Did something happen at work?”

Will gave a nod, nose scrunched up in distaste. “Jack might know.”

“Know what?” Hannibal pushed, not sounding concerned in the slightest. In fact, Will was more than a little pissed that the man went back to his sketching.

“About you being here. He saw me eating my lunch.”

“There was nothing wrong with you eating lunch.”

Will growled through his teeth and Hannibal paused, pencil rolling between his fingers as he looked up at Will with raised eyebrows. “He knows you made it. He suspects me of tampering with the evidence. He won’t outright say it, but he implied it. Heavily.”

“I am not sure what it is you are expecting me to do.”

Will’s knees buckled with another groan and he threw his head back, hands going to his face. “I don’t know,” he replied. “I have no idea what I’m expecting you to do. I have no idea what I need to do. I don’t know anything anymore. All I know is that I have to protect you and if Jack suspects that I know where you are, then he’s going to come down on this place like a smiting from God.”

Will’s hands lowered onto the table and he used it for balance, head dropped between his shoulders as he exhaled sharply. He shook his head and Hannibal wanted to know exactly what thoughts were running through the empath’s mind.

“Maybe I’m overreacting.” One of Will’s hands rubbed at his jaw and he sighed. “Maybe I’m-”

“One should always trust one’s first instinct,” Hannibal advised. “I can leave Will. I’m obviously causing a great deal of stress. And-”

“I don’t want you to leave,” Will interrupted, waving away Hannibal’s words. “I’m not going to make you leave.”

“Will, I am-”

“Please don’t leave me.” Will’s voice shattered. “Not you too. Please.”

Hannibal gave a small nod at the fragileness. How any others had left Will, even just recently... Hannibal could drop the subject. He had no intention of leaving the empath in the slightest if he didn't have to. "Then what do we do to fix this? I'm not sure I could go any further underground than if I were underground."

"I don't know," Will whispered. "Maybe you do need to go. You're right and I'm just being selfish in keeping you here."

"Not in the slightest." Hannibal leaned back in his chair, hand over his mouth in thought. "We will just need to be more careful. I will continue to lay low and you need to stop breaking into the labs to mess with evidence."

"But-"

"No buts, Will." Hannibal reached out and took the wrist of Will's hand, fingers gently caressing over the pulse pounding there. "This isn't sustainable if we continue on the way we are. You need to be safer and smarter with what you are doing for the FBI. There is such a thing as keeping your enemies too close."

Will gave a small nod. "You're right." His free hand rubbed at his eyes under his glasses before he pulled them off and tossed them onto the table. "You're right."

"I do appreciate the efforts though."

Will gave a small, weak smile and a forced burst of laughter, hands fidgeting so much that Hannibal released his hold on Will. "What were you drawing?"

Will seemed decently relaxed after that incident, Hannibal noted in the days that followed. As relaxed as one could be, he supposed, though it didn't last as long as Hannibal would have liked. Apparently Jack hadn't bothered Will at work and Hannibal had been more than careful when he was at home during the day. The dogs only went out when they absolutely needed it and Hannibal kept all the lights off until it got too dark to see with the curtains drawn.

"I'm working later tonight," Will announced into the quiet of the room, a tenseness to his voice that hadn't left it even after Hannibal had been reassured that Will was just fine. Hannibal gave a small hum in answer, not looking up from the book that was in his hands. Will glanced from the toy that he was playing tug of war with Izzy with, eyebrows furrowed. "Are you ignoring me?"

"Not at all Will," Hannibal answered dully, attention obviously still in the pages of whatever book he had deemed interesting enough from Will's sparse collection. Will let go of the toy and Izzy raced off to her bed with a playful snarl, settling beside a sleeping Winston. Will watched as Hannibal turned a page and Will sucked on his teeth, a flicker of jealousy in his veins when he knew perfectly well there really was no reason for there to be.

"Look at me, Hannibal."

Hannibal inhaled deeply and took his time, marking where he was in his book before his eyes flickered up to Will briefly and then returned down to his book, his finger lifting back up as he continued reading. "Yes, Will?"

Maybe Will hadn't settled down. Hannibal could smell the anxiety that filled the air with an acidic twang and for some reason it made his inside squirm with wanting to see how far Will could be pushed before he snapped. Will was going to become so strung out that he snapped and Hannibal would rather it were at home where Will was safe and Hannibal could control it over Will breaking at work where he could possibly give them away in front of Jack. Will had a way with letting words slip out when he was frazzled, when too many emotions were there for him to pick up on.

Will rose to his feet, hands clenching and unclenching as he tried not to take it personally that the book was far more interesting than he was. He wasn't sure he wanted to deal with this at the moment. He felt like he had been pulled tight like a fraying rope that was about to snap. He hadn't been sleeping and he hadn't been able to eat more than a few bites, Jack's words continuing to rumble through his head, mocking him, keeping him on the very edge of his seat and ready to jump into action at the single movement towards Hannibal. It was exhausting.

And that wasn't right. Will knew exactly what he wanted to do. He wanted to poke the beast. He wanted the monster's attention on him. The wendigo belonged to him and would do exactly as he said. Especially if he was going to such lengths to make sure the man was safe. Will wouldn't be ignored. Not now, not ever.

"Hannibal."

Hannibal was slightly surprised at the darkness that inflected his tone, enough so that his eyes flickered up once more to find the gentleness that was normally over Will's features replaced by a harshness that Hannibal had only seen on a handful of occasions, one of those being the night he killed Randel Tier, another when they had taken down Francis Dolarhyde, and again on the roof of Hall Mansion, though that one was a bit of a blur.

Hannibal's eyes lowered back to his book, able to nearly see the fuse that had been lit on Will that was going to send Will over the edge. An edge that he very clearly needed to get over before it turned into a much larger cliff and Hannibal knew how badly neither of them needed another tumble.

"Dr. Lecter."

Hannibal's lips pursed and he turned the page of his book, though he had lost interest in it quite a time ago. "You only call me that when you're upset with me or trying to make a point. So, which is it Will?"

"Put the book down," Will ordered, voice low with a deep anger.

Hannibal slowly obeyed, memorizing which page he had been on and closing the book quietly, setting it on the side table, next to the lamp. Hannibal folded his hands in his lap and his eyes finally met Will, whose jaw was clenched tightly.

"Don't grind your teeth, dear boy," Hannibal warned.

"Do not tell me what to do," Will hissed, hands now fists. Blue eyes were aflame and Hannibal watched him with a curious glint to his own eyes, head tipped up, showing he was fully invested in Will now. "What was so interesting about the book?"

"The Song of Achilles," Hannibal replied. "An erotic retelling of the Iliad."

Will's eyes narrowed. "You're reading gay porn about Greek Gods?"

"Your wife owns gay porn about the Greek Gods. Surely you wouldn't buy something of the sort."

That only seemed to make Will's anger deepen, the vein in his temple throbbing. "Don't you dare mention that woman."

"What's wrong Will?" Hannibal said, his voice tilted enough to be taunting, but not enough to outright be insulting.

"What's wrong?" Will echoed back with a small nod. "What's wrong? I-I don't know." It was sarcastic and sounded like it was being torn from his mouth. "I'm about to lose my mind because things have been too good and it's going to come crashing back down. I know it is, because nothing is ever good for me! It never stays! So I might as well make everything burn while I still have control over it."

"You cannot control fire once it is set, Will," Hannibal warned, eyes trailing over the stiff line of Will's body.

"But I can pick when to light the match and a match sounds pretty good right now." Will began pacing the floor, hands unclenching and clenching again before they went to his curls, shaking them out and making them wilder than they already were, a halo of coffee hues with a hint of cinnamon.

"Will-"

"Shut up!" Will ordered, his pacing coming to a stop and causing Hannibal's mouth to open a little in shock at the blatant harshness that was there. He quickly closed it, not taking the words to heart, knowing Will didn't necessarily mean them, but the sting is his chest didn't dissipate. "I do not want your infinite wisdom, humble opinion or your pity at the moment."

"Then what do you want?"

"To feel powerful, to feel in control. To know the outcome of this game that I am playing."

"And ordering me around is that control?" Hannibal pointed out, forming it as a question to try to bring it to light rather than shove it harshly out of the darkness. Will went still and his face fell. "My mind is filled with cataclysm and apocalypse: I wish for earthquakes, eruptions, flood. Only that seems large enough to hold all of my rage and grief. I want the world overturned like a bowl of eggs, smashed at my feet." Will knew that voice. He was quoting something, though Will wasn't exactly sure what he was quoting. Hannibal tapped the book in answer and Will gave a small nod in understanding. "Does that sum it up?"

"Accurately," Will grumbled. "That does not change the fact that I want your eyes to stay on me; I want your attention on me. I am more important than that stupid book, Hannibal." Hannibal tipped his head to the side like he had so many times before while in therapy, a silent asking for a further explanation and Will felt his blood boil. "I don't need to justify myself to you."

"I didn't say you did."

Will glared, fingers twitching as his side. "Get on your knees."

Hannibal's head tilted in the opposite direction with a raise of his eyebrows, though he couldn't deny that he liked the order in Will's tone. It was fierce and commanding. But Hannibal had to push. He liked to push, to play, but he also knew that if he obeyed then Will wasn't going to get the breath that he was gasping for, the boy would keep drowning. "I do not take kindly of orders," Hannibal stated firmly, hands unfolding and refolding on his lap, eyes lowering from Will's face for a fraction of a second.

Will growled. "I told you to keep your eyes on me. Get on your knees."

Hannibal's eyes returned to Will's face, intrigued by the darkness in his features. The sharp cut of his jaw, eyes flashing, lips curled around sharp white teeth, making his scar stand out beautifully. Hannibal studied Will's face for a moment more, but didn't budge.

"I'm sure you can be more convincing than that," Hannibal provoked, a hand reaching out and picking at imaginary dust at his knee, eyes once more off of Will.

There was a flurry of movement and the click of the latch on a holster. Hannibal looked up and eyes wandered curiously over Will who had his gun up and aimed right for Hannibal's head, though his finger wasn't on the trigger, held safely at the side of the gun.

"If you look away from me again, I am going to ruin your perfect little knee that was just fixed up," Will hissed through his teeth. "Get on your knees, Dr. Lecter. I will not be kind if I have to say it again."

Hannibal inhaled deeply, eyes focused directly on Will now, not leaving Will's face for a moment as he lowered himself from the couch and onto his knees, at attention for Will. Will stepped forward slowly.

"Hands behind your head, lace your fingers, cross your ankles," he instructed, the verbiage second nature to him now even after all of the years of not being a cop.

His eyes watched Hannibal carefully as the man slowly obeyed, not breaking eye contact. Will's blood rushed loudly through his veins and he couldn't keep his breathing steady. He stepped closer still and pressed the barrel of the gun against Hannibal's forehead. He was half expecting Hannibal to flinch like he had when Will had broken into his house after being released from the mental hospital, but to Hannibal's credit, the man stayed still, eyes still on Will just as ordered.

"You are going to be my control so that I don't do something that will end up getting us caught. Do you understand?" Will asked softly. Hannibal gave a small nod. Will looked over Hannibal, eyes landing on the man's lips and he frowned. "You talk too much, Dr. Lecter." Will lowered the gun slowly and pushed it against Hannibal's lips. "Keep your pretty mouth busy while you listen to what I say."

Hannibal blinked several times and Will could nearly hear the words, *I could never predict you* spinning through Hannibal's mind. Will waited for a moment and was about to open his mouth to say something cruel, but stopped when Hannibal's tongue slipped out and licked at the barrel of the gun, hot, wet and lewd. Will's eyes widened in surprise, something swirling dangerously hot in his gut, a flush filling his cheeks.

Will cleared his dry throat, eyes still locked with Hannibal's as the killer continued to lap at the gun like it was a lollipop.

"Damn it," Will cursed, rubbing at his face with his free hand. "I'm working later tonight. I won't be home until about nine. Do you understand?" The moan that came in answer from Hannibal made Will's teeth clench and his knees go weak, eyes unable to leave Hannibal's obscene work. "I expect several things to be done when I get home. I want dinner made and on the table. I want to eat something greasy and processed and something that you would never cook, but you are going to cook it for me, am I making myself clear?" Another moan and Will bit his bottom lip, trying to keep his own desires quiet. "I don't think I can live through another five star meal at the moment. Then I want a bath drawn and I want you to wash me, head to toe using that soap that smells like you."

Will couldn't tear his eyes away as Hannibal's mouth closed around the barrel of the gun, Will's mind nearly going blank at how dirty and filthy this was, how sick he was for enjoying it as much as he did, how much he hated that Hannibal still had control in the situation when Will wanted it.

"I don't have to work tomorrow," Will continued on before his mouth could freeze up too. "I want to be fucked into the mattress until I am begging for you to stop. I want to be restrained and used. I want to be ruined under you." Will wasn't sure if the next sound that came from Hannibal's throat was in understanding or in pleasure, but the white hot lightning that it sent through Will made Will's mouth tighten into a firm line. He pulled his gun from Hannibal's mouth, unsure if he could keep on his feet if the man continued. "Stop that," he ordered harshly, watching saliva drip down Hannibal's chin from red, swollen lips as Hannibal tried to catch his breath.

Will exhaled deeply. "How are you still in control?" Will asked softly, Hannibal's lust filled eyes becoming clouded with confusion. "I can have this gun shoved down your throat and you still have control over the situation. I want control, Hannibal. Give me something that I have control over."

Hannibal licked at his lips, eyes still very locked on Will, not daring to look away, breath heavy. "You want me to give you something to control?" Hannibal asked, voice ragged from his earlier demonstrations of what was possibly going to happen that night. "Control is taken, not given."

Will closed his eyes with an exasperated sigh, gun going back up. He opened his eyes and used his other hand to pull back the hammer, the gun clicking at the action, though his finger was still off the trigger.

"I am taking it Hannibal," Will said through tight teeth. "Give me control."

"You want to know the outcome of the game you're playing?" Hannibal asked in a reminder more than needing to know. "You can control the answer to this question. I had hoped-"

"Hannibal," Will warned, shaking the gun slightly in his hand. "I do not want explanations."

"Will you marry me?"

Will blinked, the anger suddenly stripped from his system, his body going cold and weak. Will's eyes flickered over Hannibal's face, trying to decide if the man was being serious or playing another game. Sometimes it was so hard to tell. Will de-cocked the gun and lowered it, the harshness gone from his face.

"Are you asking me to marry you during a fight?" Will finally asked when he found his voice. "I have a gun to your head and you ask me to marry you."

"I'm sorry it's not romantic," Hannibal answered, though Will didn't pick up any of the arrogant sarcasm he had expected to come with the words. "I know we can't right away, you have legal issues to work through and everything will have to be done very under the table, but..." Hannibal gave a small shrug. "You can control the answer."

Will put his gun back into his holster and looked around the room as if the answer would be written on the walls for him. He held out his hand and Hannibal took it, letting Will pull him to his feet.

Will took Hannibal's face in his hands and kissed at Hannibal's swollen lips, licking into him. There was a background saltiness to the gunpowder that was in Hannibal's mouth, though most of the taste was bitter and tangy, astringent. Will didn't mind. It was his design after all.

"The moment that Molly is out of the picture," Will gasped against Hannibal's lips as he continued to kiss him, "I will marry you, Hannibal. And I want your last name." Will wasn't sure how long he kissed Hannibal and he didn't care, all he cared about was that this man was close to him. Will didn't need to be in control anymore, not when Hannibal could take care of him.

"I'm sorry," Hannibal muttered, pushing Will back slightly, lips looking utterly abused. "I pushed you." Hannibal's fingers glided through Will's unruly curls and Will sighed at the touch. "I had to make sure that you didn't explode anywhere near Jack." Will gave a small nod in understanding, eyes closed as Hannibal kissed him this time. "Are you feeling better?" Will gave another small nod. "Why do you have to work later?"

"I'm covering a night class for someone," Will replied, voice sounding just as used as Hannibal's.

"I will make sure there is something greasy and processed on the table when you get home and that there is a bath waiting for you, Mr. Lecter, " Hannibal said, making Will groan with a small laugh.

"I need to go," Will whispered a few hours later, between kisses from Hannibal. Hannibal shook his head, dismissing the idea and his hands continued to tug at curls and wrinkle Will's shirt, pull at Will's skinny black tie that he had put on. "I'm going to be late for my class."

"I don't care."

Will grinned into the kiss and pulled away from Hannibal, pushing away Hannibal's hands and going to grab his bag. He slung it over his shoulder and turned back with a sigh, taking Hannibal's face to kiss him once more, before moving his lips to kiss at Hannibal's sharp cheekbones.

"I'll be back soon. Promise," Will assured, once more pulling away from Hannibal and heading for the front door. He grabbed his coat and slung it over his arm, giving a laugh as Hannibal's hands snatched up his waist and kisses were pressed into his neck, around his long curls. "Hannibal."

"Why do you teach so far away?" Hannibal grumbled, arms snaking around Will's middle.

"To give you time to get everything I wanted ready tonight," Will replied smugly. "I need to go, Hannibal." Will pulled himself free with a smile over his shoulder. "I love you."

"*Je t'aime aussi, mon cher (I love you too, my dear),"* Hannibal muttered back, watching as Will left the house.

Hannibal settled himself back into the couch, pulling the book back into his lap and opening to the page he had left off on before Will's breakdown, but his mind was more focused on trying to think up something to make for dinner that Will would like that also wouldn't put his skills to shame, despite that most likely being the point.

Will had enjoyed the gumbo. He liked southern cooking, something that Hannibal wasn't necessarily familiar with, but he was certain he could figure something out. Maybe breakfast would be an easier route and there were eggs that needed to be used and some potatoes that were going to go bad soon and Hannibal hated to waste food, even if he didn't want for it.

Hannibal rose from the couch, book set aside for another book he fetched from the kitchen. Molly had a wide arrange of cookbooks in her cupboard above the microwave that Hannibal hadn't really looked into much, but it was a start. He glanced through the titles until he found one that caught his attention, fetching it out and flipping through the pages.

It was full of different comfort foods from the south and Hannibal wondered if maybe this had been Will's book or if Molly had gotten it to try to make something for him and failed. Hannibal smiled at the idea. He wouldn't fail Will. Not like she had.

His eyes settled on a recipe and he gave a small nod. Fried, greasy, fatty, something that Hannibal would never cook without being forced to with a gun to his head. Unless it was Will. He didn't need a gun to his head for Will, though it was a much more convincing argument.

Hannibal set the cookbook on the counter and began gathering everything he needed for biscuits and gravy and chicken fried steak. He still had a few hours, but he could get the prep out of the way and start defrosting the meat. He pulled the chicken from the freezer and placed it on the stove, stopping at the sound of an approaching car.

Hannibal glanced towards the kitchen window curiously. Maybe Will had just forgotten something. But at the sound of two car doors opening instead of one, Hannibal stepped closer to the window, barely pulling the curtain open enough to glance out. He could only stare for a moment at the sight of Molly and Walter, or who he assumed were Molly and Walter. He wasn't sure if he had ever actually seen them before, but he wasn't sure who else would be coming up to the porch.

Hannibal sighed and let the curtain fall closed before kicking off his shoes so his footsteps would be silent and picking a knife from the knife block on the counter. He went to the stairs and started up them before turning the corner as he heard the front door being unlocked and opened.

"We're just picking up some stuff," Molly explained over the sound of keys being shoved into a pocket. "Don't you want your card collection and stuff? Some other clothes to wear maybe?"

"Won't Will be mad?" a younger voice asked with a sigh. Hannibal did recognize that voice. It had been the voice that had called Will twice, once in the early morning and once in the middle of the night. Once for a crime scene that he had found and the other for nightmares he was having.

"Will does not have to know," Molly's voice answered. There was a pause and Hannibal listened carefully, waiting for anything further. "Go grab your things."

The instruction was said softly and Hannibal could hear footsteps on the stairs, knowing he had two options, both of which are not very great, but one has more weight to it than the other. And Hannibal wanted to know more about them, wanted to understand Will's attachment to the kid. He simply wanted to know.

Hannibal watched the boy turn down the opposite hallway, missing Hannibal completely, before he moved into the bedroom after Walter. The boy left the door open and Hannibal glanced around, watching the dark haired boy with freckles over his pale nose go to his dresser and grab some items from the top of it.

Hannibal cleared his throat as he stepped further into the room and Walter jumped, spinning around. He looked over Hannibal for a moment with wide eyes, breathing rushed, chest and shoulders rising and falling. His eyes softened after a moment and his head tipped to the side, causing Hannibal's expression to turn to one of curiosity. The boy's eyes dropped down to the knife in Hannibal's hand before returning back to Hannibal's face.

"You're Hannibal the cannibal," the boy said after a moment of tense silence.

"What was that, Wally?" Molly called from the stairs.

Hannibal tipped his head to the side, watching and waiting carefully for what the boy would do. "Nothing mom!" Walter called back, eyes not leaving Hannibal's for a moment. "Just talking to myself!"

"Alright hun!"

Hannibal exhaled deeply, eyes wandering the boy quizzically. "What makes you say that?" Hannibal asked softly.

"The book. Isn't that what you were called?" Walter asked, leaving where he stood by the messy dresser and moving over to his just as messy desk, scooping up the book and holding it out to Hannibal. "See?" Hannibal cautiously stepped over to the desk, hand tight around the knife in his hand. He looked over the outheld book, frowning at the cover. It was a picture of him and then a smaller picture of Dr. Chilton in the bottom left. In big red letters across the top was *Hannibal The Cannibal, The Disturbed Mind of Dr. Lecter.* "I didn't like the book much."

Hannibal gave an amused tilt of his lips at the words. "Neither did I."

Walter gave a nod and placed the book back on his desk and Hannibal followed the movement, picking out different things across the boy's desk. There were newspaper clippings, printed stories from Tattlecrimes, photocopies of what looked like police reports. Reports that Hannibal recognized from Will's case files and he couldn't help but guess that the boy had found his father's work and had made his own copies of it.

There were books about Hannibal as well, not just Dr. Chilton's. Others that Hannibal hadn't known existed, though he would have read them if he did know they existed. It was laughable what these people would say, how they would try to categorize him when there was never a way for him to be placed in a perfect box. He found his own works too. His own medical papers and his own research. Photographs of his drawings that had to also have been taken from Will's case files.

And then pictures of him and Will. Pictures mostly from Freddie Lounds, but some others that Hannibal was certain he had never known were being taken. Some from their time in Europe and it made Hannibal wonder how many people were really after him aside from Mason Verger.

There were court files as well, documents of both Will's and Hannibal's court cases. And it looked like there were some Tooth Fairy and Great Red Dragon related newspaper clippings as well.

"Are you here for my dad?"

Hannibal's attention was pulled front the large array of documentation and he looked over the boy. "I suppose in a way. At the moment I am more concerned over you and your mother," Hannibal answered, eyes returning to the desk for a moment. "What are you doing with all of this?"

"After that man attacked us, I read an article about Will and that he had killed someone. That you framed him for your own crimes and I had to understand," Walter explained, voice hushed as well. "So I have been reading everything I can find on you."

"Flattery is not going to help you," Hannibal warned, knife going out towards Walter who honestly seemed fairly in control. But he had sounded decently in control when Will had told Hannibal about the Witch Hunter's case.

"I won't tell my mom you're here. Can I just go?"

Hannibal was taken aback by the words, the child just as unpredictable as Will. He almost considered letting the boy go, but he couldn't bring himself to. He wanted to know these strange people better. He wanted to know the woman who Will never wanted to speak of again and the boy that Will wouldn't leave.

"I can't," Hannibal muttered and Walter gave a small nod, accepting. Just accepting and it made Hannibal question his choice once more. "Downstairs." Hannibal motioned to the bedroom door with the knife and Walter moved passed him and for the door, Hannibal close behind him, taking the boy's shoulder tightly in his vise-like grip.

"Wally, are you ready to go?" Molly's voice said from the bottom of the stairs. "Will needs to stop leaving food out, he's going to make himself sick."

Hannibal kept his grip on the boy as they entered the living room and Hannibal looked over the woman who was busing herself in the kitchen with something. She must have put the dogs in their kennels because they were nowhere to be found and Hannibal was more than aware of the way Izzy acted around her.

Molly looked nearly the same size as Will, small and dainty. Her dark blond hair was pulled up and out of her face and when she turned around, Hannibal was greeted with full chipmunk cheeks framed by bangs. Not what he had pictured the woman to look like, curious what Will found in her if there was anything at all worth finding.

She stopped with wide eyes at the sight of Hannibal with a knife held nearly against her son's neck. "I would appreciate it if you didn't mess with dinner. Will requested something fairly specific for tonight," Hannibal said into the silence.

"You're Dr. Lecter," Molly blurted out, as if that was the only clear thought in her mind.

"And you must be the wife," Hannibal said with a small nod. "Molly, Will keeps rope in the shed outside. Would you mind fetching it for me? I do not think I have to warn you about the implications of you disobeying me." Molly's eyes lowered to Walter and she gave a small nod, heading for the back door. "Molly." Molly stopped and glanced back, finding Hannibal's open hand outstretched. "Phone, please. I do not need you getting any smart ideas while you're alone."

Molly stepped closer to Hannibal and reached into her pocket, pulling out her phone and passing it over to Hannibal who took it and slid it into his own pocket before his hand returned to Walter's shoulder. Hannibal waited for Molly to be out of the house before he moved Walter to the kitchen chair and sat him down in it, looking out the sliding glass door that Molly had left through to make sure she was doing what he wanted.

When she disappeared into the shed, Hannibal returned to the kitchen and fetched out the chicken that Molly had returned to the freezer. He looked over the cookbook and read through some of the directions before a voice spoke.

“What are you making? Are you cooking people?”

Hannibal’s hand rested on the edge of the counter and he looked over the boy who was still sitting perfectly where he had placed him. There were footsteps from outside the sliding glass door and Hannibal watched as Molly returned with her several bundles of nylon rope.

Hannibal picked back up the knife from the counter and stepped closer. “Tie up your son, if you would.”

“Will said you were sickeningly polite,” Molly grumbled with dark eyes as she set the rope down on the dining table and picked one up, unrolling it from its tight coil. The rope was no longer white, grey and dirty from being used most likely on Will’s boat that Hannibal had been curious to see once he learned that Will had sailed across the ocean to find him in Italy. “I didn’t think it was true.”

“Will spoke about me?” Hannibal asked in curiosity. It had been a very lonely three years without Will there and Hannibal had figured that Will had completely pushed Hannibal aside.

“When I made him,” Molly answered, glancing down at her son for a moment, voice softening for her boy. “Don’t worry. Will will be home soon.”

Hannibal didn’t respond to the words, just watched as Molly obeyed, her son tied to the chair and then she looked to Hannibal with hard eyes, waiting for Hannibal’s next orders. Hannibal simply nodded to the chair beside Walter which Molly takes and Hannibal moves over, snatching up another one of the ropes and making quick work of tight knots around Molly’s hands and torso.

Molly’s eyes were tight as Lecter stepped away and she took the man in. The man from sweaty nightmares and pictures burned in fireplaces and incoherent mumblings in sleep. She recognized the clothing. The sweater was Will’s, something larger that he didn’t wear often, only if it were extremely cold. And she was pretty sure that the slacks were Will’s too, a little too tight and a fraction too short for Lecter. But the dark green of the sweater and the deep grey of the pants seemed to bring a lightness to his sharp cheekbones that could cut glass and his dark, cold, emotionless eyes that death himself must live in.

Molly watched as Lecter moved around her kitchen, far too well acquainted for someone who had stopped by to find her husband. She stayed quiet as did Walter, Lecter simply content to be in the kitchen and she kept her eyes on him as he eventually wandered over to the bar and pulled out a bottle of wine, looking over it before returning to the kitchen, pouring himself a decent glass and taking a thoughtful sip.

And Molly continued to stay quiet, not quite brave enough and far too aware of Lecter’s pathological taste for the rude to voice her opinions about him. Instead, she observed him work. He pulled a knife from the knife block and looked over the blade, obviously finding it unsatisfactory. He opened another drawer and pulled out her sharpener, dragging the blade of the knife down at a precise angle. A ring and clash of metal sounded through the quiet home and Molly took the chance to test her bindings only to find that they all held tight.

Lecter inspected the knife once more, lips tipping into a slight smile and as he put the sharpener away and Molly couldn't help but note that he looked like a child showing off an art project as the light caught the blade, Lecter more than pleased with himself.

Look.

She did. More than she truly cared for and she wondered if she saw a fraction of what Will saw when he looked at this man or if this was the merest echo of it, Lecter's person suit fully on and not going to be taken off anytime soon. But she knew that she was seeing exactly what she was supposed to be seeing. Lecter had allowed this, intended it, let her see just enough.

He fetched a cutting board and then some potatoes from the pantry, washing them in the sink, the only sound was him working. Molly's eyes dropped down to Wally who was simply sitting there with a curious look on his face, watching Lecter work as well.

Lecter's motions were efficient and fluid as he cut the potatoes into thin shoelace strips for fries or possibly hash browns. From what Molly had gathered from the open cookbook, Molly was pretty sure it was the latter.

"You hold your husband to impossible standards, you know."

The sound of his voice filled the room and Molly caught him glancing up to her, waiting for her reply. "You underestimate him," she shot back in a challenge, though her voice was light.

"I have done many things to Will, but underestimating him is not one of them," Lecter defended, putting the potatoes into a waiting bowl and setting the cutting board and knife aside to once again move to the pantry, coming back with flour and sugar. He took another small sip of his wine, looking far too comfortable in her home for her liking. "Do you see him as perfect, Molly? Clothed in nothing but flawlessness? A hero that will always come to rescue you? A knight in shining armor?" He was making dough, adding milk and yeast with the sugar into a bowl and letting it sit for a moment. "That would require him to be under the rule of someone. Will is his own master."

Molly could hear the endearment in Lecter's tone and knew in an instant that he enjoyed the thought of Will as such a person. Saw Will like a God, but wasn't God just the same as perfection?

"And what kind of God do you think he'll be?" Molly asked, causing the man to tip his head to the side, regarding her questioningly, hands on the edge of the counter. She suddenly didn't want the answer anymore at the flash of his eyes.

"Something beautifully blurred with darkness and light," Lecter replied carefully.

"And you're going to get him there?"

"I don't need to. He can find his way himself. I simply pointed him in the right direction." Lecter went back to work on the dough now that the yeast had a chance to bloom.

"Was I in your right direction?" Molly asked, calling those dirt red eyes back to her face. She watched carefully as Lecter licked at his lips, considering her words.

"You were a setback."

Molly gave a small laugh, Lecter's eyes once more on her. "He's not going to abandon us for you." She understood now. Understood why Will never spoke of him to her, why she only knew about the basics, about a twisted friendship that was so screwed to high heavens that maybe it was more than a friendship. Will didn't speak of Lecter not because Will was afraid of him or wanted to forget him. Will didn't speak of Lecter because of his feelings for Lecter. She hadn't seen it before and she was a bit shocked that it took this killer sitting at home in her kitchen that made it clear as day. "Just because you care for him in some roundabout way doesn't mean he will run with you. Not anymore. Not with us here."

"You seem to be holding tightly to the fact that you're still married when you're the one trying to abandon him," Hannibal stated strongly, going back to the dough. He dusted some flour on the counter and let the sticky ball of goo land on the counter, kneading it with strong shoulders and flexing muscles in his arms. "He has a very good lawyer set up."

It was a lie. Molly could tell it was, only because Lecter wanted it to be known as a lie, but she didn't doubt that Lecter had the means to get Will any lawyer that Will could need, that he would get Will any lawyer that he could possibly need. He screamed money from the way he stood and commanded the room, not just from what Will had told her.

"He wouldn't leave Walter," Molly tried again, anything to throw this man off, anything at all, not suddenly nearly as afraid of him as she had been. He was still just a man, not the boogie man that the media had portrayed him as. He was just like anyone else. "Will is a wonderful father."

"And I have no doubt that your boy is a wonderful child," Lecter agrees with a nod, placing the dough back into the bowl, covering it with a damp towel and putting it on top of the fridge to let it rise. He picked up his wine glass, holding it delicately and made his way over to the table, taking a seat across from Molly and Walter, looking over them as he took a sip of his wine. He looked quite bored, his words blandly polite, Molly clearly not good enough. "I have to say that Will has saved you once more Molly. If he hadn't asked for something specific, I would have abandoned my original dinner plans for something else."

The smile that was shot over the wine glass froze Molly in place. She had categorized Lecter away into the massive file of serial killers that Will had put behind bars, the list quite extensive. She had been content to allow the man to live as a shadow that sometimes clung to Will's body, but she had all but forgotten that this man was in fact the world's most well-known cannibal next to Jeffery Dahmer.

"Was I to be on the menu, Dr. Lecter?"

The boy reacted at that, looking between his mother and the man with wide eyes as if he hadn't considered the idea, but he didn't say a word. Hannibal didn't need to, to know that the boy was worried.

"Will and I could dine on your heart."

Molly blinked with a confused look. Lecter's gaze was dispassionate, uncaring. Tone, not quite boredom, blank insincerity on his face. Maybe it would be best to keep him uninterested in them until Will came back home. His last class would be in an hour or so at the latest and Lecter didn't look too keen on doing more than sipping his wine quietly.

"And what of *our* son?" Molly taunted, unable to hold back. She could twist the knife she held.

Acid sharp envy covered his face, wine glass hitting the dining table with excessive force and both Walter and Molly jumped at the sound, Molly surprised that the glass didn't break. The wine swirled dangerously in the glass, nearly spilling. The action was so far from the calm that Lecter had been showing that Molly panicked.

Too far. You went too far.

Lecter didn't look up at her though.

"Your son is not an adequate substitute for *our* daughter."

"Your daughter?" Molly asked, the words echoing around, receiving another wide eyed stare from Walter who was still being ever dutifully silent. "Yours and Will's?"

"I guess it is to be expected that he wouldn't have mentioned her," Hannibal mused, a calmness back over him as he picked up the wine class and took another sip of the dark liquid. "Losing a child is difficult. His betrayal was beautiful as is every aspect of him and it put all of that to death."

"You killed it," came Walter's small voice much to the amusement of Hannibal, whose eyes quickly shifted from the wine glass to the boy. "You killed her. Abigail Hobbs, right?"

"Such a cunning boy," Hannibal muttered, leaning forward over the table on his forearms, eyes flickering over the boy. Maybe he had misjudged. "I killed her because he killed a part of me. He forgave me."

"For killing your daughter?" Walter asked with a hint of distaste in his tone that made Hannibal frown.

"We were going to live in Florence," Hannibal said decidedly, leaning back in his chair once more. "Walk past the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore and Piazza Duomo on the way to the market. I was going to teach him Italian."

"Are you upset that I gave him everything you offered?" Molly asked, her mind turning over and over as she tried to put together what she had done to rile this man other than her remarks earlier. She had never met him before, never wanted to meet him and yet he had openly admitted to wanting to share her heart with her husband. "He rejected you and accepted what I had to offer. He helped raise my Wally, but he wouldn't go with you to raise your daughter. That's it, isn't it?" Lecter's right eyebrow rose as he listened, daring her to continue, hand tight on the stem of his wine glass that needed to be refilled now. That's what you hate about me, about us. I'm not a threat to your place in his life. I could never replace you, but I could replace your daughter's memory."

Lecter stayed silent, not a single word, just looked at the remaining drops of wine in his glass, giving them a small swirl. The silence was thick and Molly knew she guessed right. Molly knew it was true. She could never replace Lecter. She could never fill the Lecter shaped hole in Will's heart. She could never stop the aching that the empath had felt for the killer, though Will had simply passed it off as migraines or being lost in thought. And Molly was more than aware now that she had never really been in the same place to make Will happy.

Will didn't smile like he did when he looked at a picture of Lecter. Will didn't care for music, but he would always stop to listen to a concerto if it was playing on a commercial on the TV or in a store, almost reverently. Will didn't touch her like... he let Lecter touch him. Those bite marks hadn't been from an attack and Molly was curious if they were still littering his skin.

"*Atsiprašau už praradimą Abigail."* (Sorry for the loss of Abigail.)

The words froze the room and the silence that cashed back in about knocked the wind from Molly, though she couldn't tell what Walter had said. But she didn't like the way that Lecter perked up at the words. His head tipped to the side, eyes scrunched up calculatingly, body once more leaning over the table, wine glass pushed aside.

"*Ar mokate lietuviškai?*" (Do you speak Lithuanian?) Hannibal asked across the table, voice holding more interest in it than it had all evening, eyes alight.

"*Truputį,*" (A little.) Walter answered back, voice confident. "I wanted to learn after finding out where you came from."

Hannibal hummed. Maybe he had absolutely misjudged the boy. Maybe he was adequate. Maybe there was hope for him after all, though Hannibal still hadn't decided exactly what he wanted to do with this situation. Molly needed to go. She needed to be pacified, she was getting on his nerves, but this boy... The child was just as interesting as Will had been when they had first met. He was smart, quick, and understanding.

"*Aš sveikinu jūsų atsiprašymą.*" (I welcome your apology.) Hannibal watched closely over the boy's face as Walter processed what was said to him. His eyebrows furrowed together and Hannibal sighed, deflated. Interest no longer there.

"*Ačiū," (Thank you,)* Walter said with a small nod after a moment or two of trying to pick apart the words in his head. "*Ar įskaudinsi mano tėvą?*" (Will you hurt my father?) Hannibal shook his head and Walter gave a deep breath of relief. "*Prašau, nepakenkite mano mamai.*" (Please don't hurt my mom.)

"*Tik šiek tiek?*" (Only a little?) Hannibal asked with a huff of laughter. "I would say you're nearly fluent."

"I've had three years."

Molly couldn't take it anymore. She didn't want to listen to anymore of the conversation between her boy and this killer in front of them who hadn't done more than tie them up. She had been expecting screaming and blood and carnage, but Lecter's gentleness was unsettling. Especially towards her son.

"How long have you been living here?" she asked out, but Hannibal ignored her, eyes still locked on her son. "You obviously know your way around the kitchen."

"*Kelios savaitės,"* (A few weeks,) was Hannibal's bored answer.

"Several weeks," Walter translated for his mother, glancing between the two adults once more, curious where this was going to go.

"Have you been sleeping in my bed?"

"*Taip*." (Yes.)

"Yes," Walter repeated in English, much to Molly's dislike. If she had known her son was doing anything that led him close to this murderer, she would have put a stop to it immediately and the thought that maybe Will had encouraged it crossed her mind and made a sour taste fill her mouth.

“Taking my place?” Molly asked.

“*Taip. Aš ne tas, kuris bando jo apleisti,”* (Yes. I’m not the one trying to abandon him,) Hannibal answered.

“I’m not the one-the one trying to abandon him,” Walter stuttered out, face scrunched up in thought.

“*Miegodamas jis šaukia mano vardą. Ar jis tai vadino, kai buvote kartu?*” (As he sleeps, he says my name. Did he call it when you were together?)

Molly chewed on her tongue. Lecter was enjoying this too much, his fun new little game that involved her son.

Hannibal’s eyes didn’t leave Walter for a moment and Molly struggled once more against her bonds that held just as tight as they did before. She wanted nothing more than to leave, to pull her son out of his reach, keep her family far away from this man. Where was Will? They had been here for a while. Shouldn’t his classes be done by now? Driving home by now?

“He said that dad calls his name while he sleeps and wanted to know if dad called his name while you were together,” Walter said softly after a long pause of mentally translating.

Hannibal’s eyes flickered up at that point to find a scowl on Molly’s face, teeth clenched tightly, though he doesn’t fear for her teeth like he had for Will’s earlier. She didn’t answer, but Hannibal didn’t need the answer to know what it was. Will had always been his. Even in all of the years apart, Will belonged to him. He smiled at the idea, something smug collecting in his chest.

“Where is Will?” Molly demanded.

Hannibal rose from his chair, taking the wine glass to the sink to begin washing it. “Unfortunately for you, he is working late tonight,” Hannibal stated above the running water. “Fortunately for me, we have more time to get to know each other now that you have become suddenly far more interesting to me.”

Chapter 26

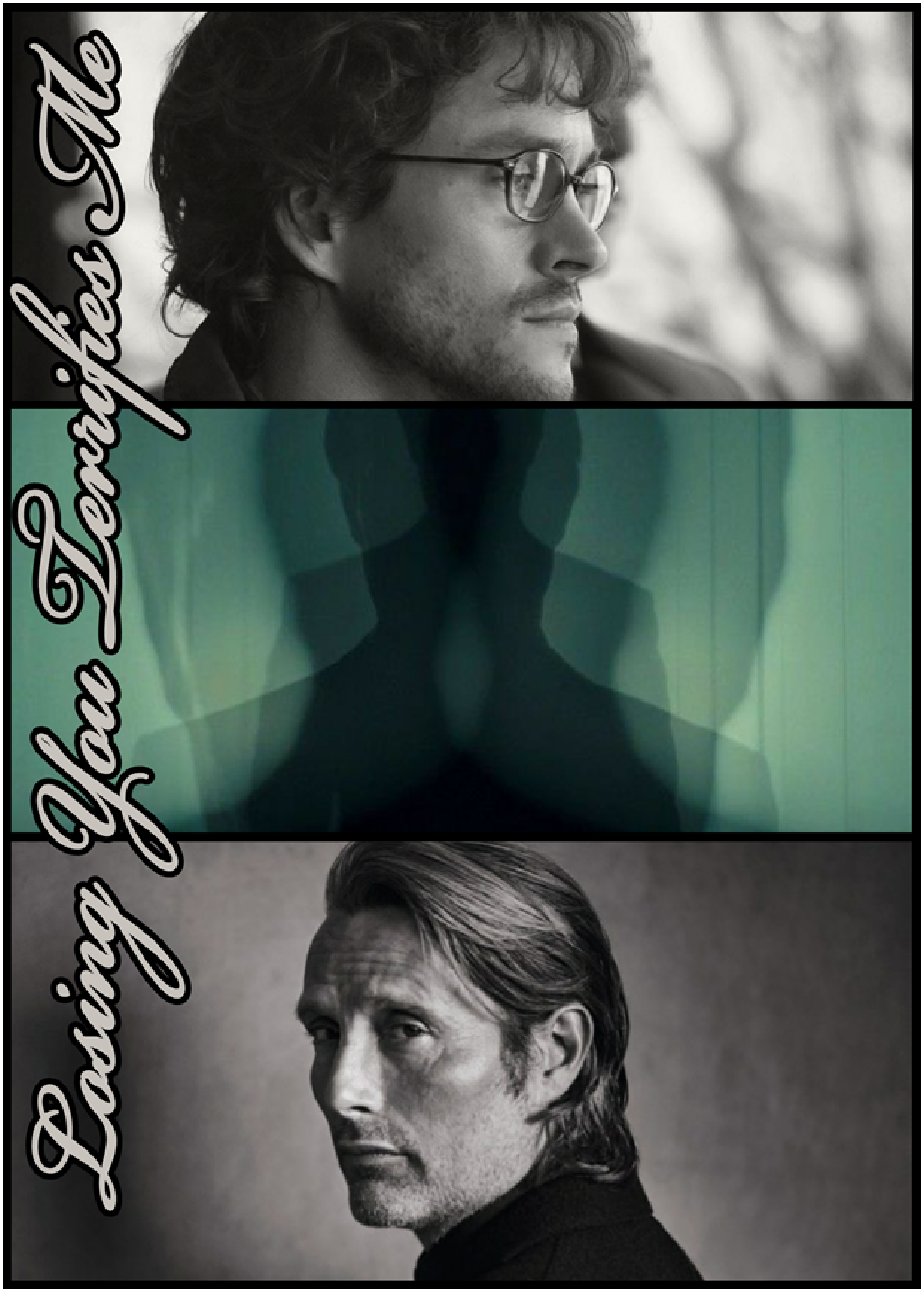
Chapter Summary

A dinner engagement. Jack wouldn't be that understated, would he?
Will paused, a small bit of anxiety starting to gum up his insides. He shook his head. He was overreacting.
"Sometimes referred to as the Pollyanna Syndrome, homeowners suffer from an excessively or blindly optimistic outlook. They think that home invasion can never happen to them, that because they live in a nice neighborhood or come from money that no one would dare try to attack them."

Chapter Notes

Here's the song I listened to for this chapter. I hope you all don't hate me too much.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDy2wCQYSrU&list=RDiDy2wCQYSrU&start_radio=1



Will packed up his desk and gave a sigh as Jack entered the room. It was late and Will wanted nothing more than to go home to Hannibal and whatever the man had planned for him, but he still had one more class. One more thing to do before he could retire for the night.

"I'm a little busy at the moment, Jack," Will said as he slung his bag over his shoulder and clutched his laptop to his chest, heading for the exit of the classroom.

"I heard you were staying late, so I thought I'd drop by," Jack replied, following Will towards where the classroom was that Will was meant to be covering.

"Make it fast."

"How kind of you."

"Jack," Will sighed, stopping in front of the door that students were pouring into. "I'm not in the mood. I want to go home and I have another hour and a half before I can even get on the road."

"How's Dr. Lecter?" Jack asked, causing Will to sigh and be grateful that Hannibal had gotten a rile out of him earlier that day.

"Jack, I haven't seen him since you found me in that cabin. I still don't remember him." Will shifted his laptop enough to pull at his glasses just so his hands had something to do. "I only know about what you've told me and what I've read in case files. I really don't know what you are wanting from me."

"Your food was continually homemade until our last conversation and now you haven't eaten lunch at all," Jack stated matter-of-factly.

"It's flattering that you take such a concern in my eating habits, Jack." Will pushed his glasses back onto his nose and reached for the door of the classroom he was needed in.

"Where is Hannibal, Will?"

Will closed his eyes with a deep breath, before opening the classroom door. "Drop it Jack. You're barking up the wrong tree." Will stopped at an air between them that he couldn't exactly place. "Would you like to join my class? We're discussing home invaders today."

"No thank you Will," Jack stated with a shake of his head. "I have a previous dinner engagement I need to keep."

"A date?" Will asked, finally looking over his shoulder.

"One could say that," Jack replied with a smile. "Have a good class Will."

"Good night Jack," Will excused before stepping into his classroom and letting the door close behind him. He walked up to the desk and lowered his laptop to the desk, bag on the floor, opening the laptop and waiting for it to boot up. He looked over the students who waited patiently for him to start the class.

"I am Mr. Graham. You will refer to me as such. I am not sir, dude or Graham. I will be substituting for your teacher this evening. She will return for your next class." Will adjusted his glasses on his nose, once more looking around the class. "Home invaders are among the most psychopathically deranged criminals on Earth. They have no concern for the sanctity of your privacy and absolutely no respect for your life." Will typed in his password and then hooked into the HDMI port for his presentation to be added to the screen. "They have no reservations on the most heinous of behavior toward their captives, and little fear, if any at all, of consequences."

Will checked the screen and made sure everything was working before grabbing the small remote and moving around to the other side of the desk.

"Unlike burglaries where the perpetrator does not like confrontations with the house owners and only wants to steal the property itself, and prefers to wait until the occupants are not at home, home invaders integrate their sociopath hatred in their larcenous behavior."

Will switched to the next slide, walking across the front of the classroom slowly. "A very dangerous part of the home invasion psychology is that some of them are not even concerned with concealing their identity because if they perceive that exposure as a threat, they will murder the witnesses."

Will paused in his step, mind quickly fleeting away and over his and Jack's odd conversation. One where Jack didn't really demand anything from him. Didn't push him at all.

"They will often use manipulation to facilitate entry and access inside your home and then force you to comply," Will continued, though his mind was far more focused on Jack than it was on his presentation.

Will clicked the next slide and glanced over it for a moment, mouth going dry. No. He was overreacting. That's not what Jack had meant at all.

"We're going to break this into four different parts, mistakes that homeowners make. The first, thinking it can't happen to you." Will counted on his fingers. "Opening your door to criminals, backyard and driveway home invasions and lastly, the best way to prevent invasions."

A dinner engagement. Jack wouldn't be that understated, would he?

Will paused, a small bit of anxiety starting to gum up his insides. He shook his head. He was overreacting.

"Sometimes referred to as the Pollyanna Syndrome, homeowners suffer from an excessively or blindly optimistic outlook. They think that home invasion can never happen to them, that because they live in a nice neighborhood or come from money that no one would dare try to attack them."

Will's pacing stopped and he chewed on his tongue. Jack never did get to attend their last dinner party. It had been effectively ruined. Could Jack really have been referring to...?

Will looked at his watch and his skin went cold. Jack had nearly a 15 minute lead on him. With a deep breath, Will moved to the desk and closed his laptop. He had to get home.

"I have something important to take care of," Will announced, picking his bag from the ground and slinging it over his shoulder. "The rest of class is excused. I will send out the rest of the presentation via email for you to review. Please make sure you review the presentation and write an essay about what you've learned. Your teacher is expecting eight pages with no less than five sources to back up the idea of homeowners not being prepared enough. Good evening."

Will gave a nod and left the room to confused whispers that he paid no mind to. He raced from the school and out to his car. Jack was going to his house. Jack was going to find Hannibal. Will wasn't sure what he was going to find when he got home, if Jack would still be alive or not, but Hannibal was priority one. Jack was no longer a friend, he had shifted into an enemy.

"Would you like to help me with dinner?" Hannibal asked after a longer moment of silence that Molly hadn't dared to break. It was later now, the sun set and the streetlamps on. The house was dim, only the light in the kitchen turned on to be able to see, but nothing more. "Walter, I don't like to be kept waiting when I have asked a question."

"I like to be called Wally," the boy said softly and Hannibal gave a small sigh from where he sat at the table, reading a book.

"Walter is just fine. I do need to get it started and if you two are going to join Will and me, then I expect a little bit of help." Hannibal closed the book he was reading and set it on the tabletop, eyes meeting Walter.

"My son is-"

"Mom," Walter chided. The child was smart. He knew how to work the situation the way it needed to be. Hannibal watched as the boy gave a slow nod, the boy knowing, whether by instinct or instructions from Will, that you stayed useful as long as you could. Usefulness meant life. "I would be more than happy to help you with dinner."

Hannibal gave a small smile and stood from the table, moving around to the other side and untying the knots that Molly had put around her son.

Once free, Hannibal left him and moved to the kitchen, pulling the dough from the top of the fridge. "Will should be home in an hour or so," Hannibal explained, stopping when Walter didn't move. Walter looked over Hannibal for a moment, mind debating what he should do now that he wasn't restrained and he found himself slowly rising from the chair, limbs tingling with the rush of blood and headed for the kitchen.

He stood beside Hannibal and waited to be told what to do. Hannibal pushed the bowl over to Walter and waited to see what the boy would do.

"What are you making?" Walter asked curiously as he pulled the towel up and revealed a nicely risen dough.

"Biscuits."

Walter gave a nod and found the drawer with the rolling pin and Hannibal pushed the bag of flour towards the kid. Walter sprinkled some on the counter, rubbed some onto the rolling pin and then dumped the dough out of the bowl.

"We're joining you for dinner?" Molly asked from where she still sat and Hannibal didn't look up from the boy's work, interested in how well the boy was doing. Maybe Molly had taught the boy a bit because Hannibal knew that while Will could read a package and could pick up skills decently after having been shown what to do, Will wouldn't just know how to roll out dough.

"We will decide what to do with you after dinner," Hannibal answered, finally looking at Molly. "I do not want to leave him out of the decision." Hannibal returned his attention to the dough and gave a small approving nod when Walter looked up at him. Hannibal moved to the drying dishes and picked up the wine glass, looking at it for a moment before passing it over to Walter who took it with a curious expression. "Use it to cut out the biscuits. I'll get a tray."

Hannibal went for the cupboard, but stopped at the sound of an approaching car for a second time that day. Hannibal gave a confused look and went to the kitchen window, pushing open the curtain enough to see a large black SUV parked in the driveway and the driver's door opened recklessly.

"Jack," Hannibal muttered with a frown. It was just one interruption after the other, wasn't it? "Go sit back down, Walter," Hannibal instructed and Walter obeyed, wine glass going to the counter as Hannibal pulled his knife closer to him. With the knife in close reach, Hannibal took the wine glass and tipped it upside down, cutting into the rolled dough as the front door was opened.

Hannibal listened to the heavy footfall of Jack, something so familiar about this moment. A fight in a kitchen. A knife at a gun fight. But Hannibal had won the last time and he would win again.

The fights in Italy didn't count. Hannibal had lost all want for life and had let Jack win until the memory of Will came to mind and he could escape. Jack didn't have a chance. Not tonight.

"Good evening, Jack," Hannibal stated, glancing up as Jack rounded the corner. "Joining us for dinner?"

"I'm afraid our last dinner didn't go quite as planned," Jack answered with a smile to his tone.

Hannibal nodded. "It did not." Hannibal eyed the gun aimed at him, knowing it held much more of a promise than Will's did. "You're looking good Jack. Younger than in New York."

"Started working out again," Jack said with a small shrug. "How long has Will been hiding you?"

"He hasn't been hiding me. I've been intruding," Hannibal explained as he cut more biscuits out of the dough, just keeping his hands busy. "Do not blame Will. I've worked very hard to blind him."

"Wally, will you untie your mother please?" Jack asked. Hannibal paused in his work and looked up to watch as Walter looked to him as if asking permission. Walter knew exactly who was still in charge. Even if Jack had the gun, Walter knew enough about alphas and being in charge. Will had taught him all about being in charge so that Walter could take care of the dogs. Hannibal was in charge. Hannibal was the alpha. "Untie Molly, Wally," Jack instructed once more.

At a nod from Hannibal, Walter rose to his feet and went to his mother's chair, tugging at the knots. His hands trembled as the task that would ordinarily be so simple became a challenge.

"*Atsipalaiduok. Tvirtai laikykite rankas,*" Hannibal's voice instructed gently, causing Jack to grit his teeth, wishing he understood what the man was saying. "*Giliai įkvėpkite*."

Walter inhaled deeply, eyes closed for a moment before he went back to his work, hands much more steady as he tugged the knots free. Once there was enough give, Molly pushed at the ropes and pulled herself free, snatching up her son from his knees and clutching him against her.

"Leave, Molly," Jack ordered, gun still trained on Hannibal, whose hand had come to rest close to the knife, ready to snatch it up if needed. There was the slamming of another car door outside and Hannibal glanced behind him as if he could see out of the window. “It is about time the man of the house joined us, don’t you think?” The words were aimed at Hannibal and Hannibal didn’t miss the shot at him, telling him that he was nothing in this situation.

Will slammed the car into park and jumped from it at the sight of the many different cars in his driveway. One was Jack's, just as Will knew it would be and the other belonged to Molly. What had she done? Why was she here? Why did the universe try to cram everyone from his life into the same building all at once? Could he have played the game better or was this always bound to happen.

The gun was pulled from its holster as Will raced up the front steps and onto the deck. He pushed open the front door and followed after the singular light that was on in the house, rules being followed. Rules that were meant to keep this from happening.

Will turned the corner into the rest of the house, gun up and glanced around the room quickly. Hannibal stood by the sink, knife by hand, boxed in on every side by their counters. Jack blocked the only exit, gun up and pointed at Hannibal. Molly clutched to Walter tightly over by the dining table and Will's eyes dropped to the floor where large amounts of rope were around the feet of the chairs, indicating that someone had been tied up at one time.

Will wasn't nearly as surprised as he should have been as he gun landed on Jack, his side picked, his path leading further into the darkness of the forest that had no moon, but a dark creature with antlers and sharp cheekbones to pull him along.

"Don't be stupid, Will," Jack warned, glancing over his shoulder to take in the new threat. But Will didn't lower his gun, stance strong even with the tenseness in his shoulder that had been stabbed more times than he liked. "This man is a killer."

"I know," Will stated strongly, eyes returning to Hannibal who was watching him curiously as if he hadn't expected Will to come to his rescue and was thoroughly stunned but pleased.

"Framed you for murder."

"I know."

"Tried to kill you multiple times."

Will licked at his lips, eyes meeting Hannibal's in the dim kitchen, a deep fondness in the red depths. "I know. But I've done the same to him."

Jack frowned at the words with a huff. "I can get you out of this Will. Fudge the reports, but you need to walk away."

"You're not taking him, Jack."

"Will," Molly sobbed out. Will had nearly forgotten that she was there, his eyes jumping towards the sound to find tears on her cheeks, grip excruciatingly tight on her boy.

"Will, take your family out of here," Jack instructed, nodding towards Molly and Walter, gun still aimed at Hannibal. Will shook his head, hands tightening its hold on his own gun. "Will, get the kid out of here."

Will exhaled loudly, eyes going to Walter and looking over his son. The kid had been through a lot. Too much and Will was only making it worse. But he couldn't lose Hannibal. He wouldn't leave Hannibal. He had to protect-

“*Eik iš čia, mano meile,*” Hannibal said in an instructive tone. Will watched as Walter’s face scrunched up and he looked towards Hannibal. Will followed Walter’s gaze and was met with a slight smile on the doctor’s lips. “*Man viskas bus gerai. Išveskite savo šeimą.*” Hannibal gave Will a reassuring nod and Will didn’t need to know Lithuanian to know exactly what the man was saying.

Will lowered his gun, shifting uncomfortably on his feet once or twice before he moved over to where Molly and Walter were. He took Molly’s arm and pulled her and Walter with him from the dining room and past the kitchen into the entryway.

“Grab your things,” he instructed in a low voice, doing his best to listen to whatever was going down in the kitchen, but it was silent, Jack obviously waiting for Will’s family to get out safely. Walter and Molly both grabbed their coats and Molly snatched up her purse, opening the front door. She pushed Walter out and looked up at Will, confusion in her eyes. “Get out of here, Molly.”

“Come with me,” she whispered in a hoarse tone, tears flowing freely now. “This isn't you.”

“You never really knew me, Molly. We both know exactly what our relationship was and we were too stubborn to say anything about it.” Will glanced behind his shoulder to the still quiet kitchen, a nervousness drumming in his system. “I was a stand in for Walter’s father and you were a stand in for Hannibal. We never really loved each other, we were just two broken people who tried to use each other to fix ourselves.”

“Will...” The word was choked and broken, eyes disbelieving despite the truth that was said. She shook her head. “You don’t mean that.”

“Dad, please don’t stay here,” Walter said behind Molly from where he stood in the doorway. “Come with us.”

Will bit the inside of his cheek and felt a sharp tug in his chest between the two things that he loved and wanted to protect. Hannibal, who was still in the kitchen, fate about to be determined and Walter, who was handling the situation surprisingly well.

Will’s hand took Molly’s arm once more, leading her out into the cold night air, but Will didn’t dare close the door behind him. He had to give Hannibal the chance. Anything to help that man inside. The man he had sold his soul for. The man he was tied to by a red thread. The man he loved so fiercely he was ready to throw everything away right now.

“Get in your car and drive away Molly,” Will instructed as he walked them down the front steps and towards the driveway. “Don’t come back here.”

“What are you going to do?” she asked, motioning Walter to get into the car.

“Whatever I need to,” Will replied sharply. “Whatever I have to, to keep him alive.”

“You’re sick, you know that?” Molly’s tone turned harsh and Will winced.

“Yeah,” he muttered, breath dead as it clung to the air. “I know.”

“He is bad for you Will.”

“I know.”

“Then why are you staying?” It was a demand, a plea, a cry, every emotion dangling in the air for Will to try to untangle and it was making his head hurt and he wanted nothing more than to shut down, turn everything off, only he couldn’t turn it off. “Why?”

“I love him.” Molly’s eyes went wide as the words were left between them, there for the night air, the universe, the fates, God himself to hear. “I’ve always loved him. I told you, you were a substitute.” Will sighed and looked back to the house he needed to return to, hands shaking with his worried energy. “I didn’t mean for you to be. I’m sorry I didn’t realize it until you sent me the divorce papers. I should have been honest with you and myself.”

“You’re mentally ill!”

“I-”

There was a muffled pop that made both of them jump, startled, and Will’s heart dropped as he turned back to the house, ready to race in. The front door opened and Will lifted his gun only to find Hannibal’s form racing out of the house. Will breathed a sigh of relief and ran to Hannibal. He had black tar running down the side of his face in the moonlight, but everything else looked fine.

“Where’s Jack?” Will asked breathlessly from where he had stopped, Hannibal only a few paces away from him now. Hannibal nodded back to the house, breathing hard, breath floating away like smoke. Will’s eyes went to the house and he was almost afraid to go inside and see the mess that Hannibal had made.

The front door opened and Jack stumbled out, a hand clutched to his chest, blood down the front of his coat, but he also didn’t look to be injured any further to Will’s eye. No, what caught Will’s eye was the speed at which Jack lifted his gun, finger firmly on the trigger.

Will’s blood rushed in his ears and he sprinted forward, through the snowy yard, and dragged Hannibal into the snow at another gunshot that shattered the quiet night. The snow was freezing against Will’s hands as he sat up, eyes dragging over Hannibal to make sure the man was safe because there had been a cry of pain. Gurgling and harsh breathing. But it wasn’t Hannibal.

“Mom!” A car door slammed shut and Will sat up to look back at where Walter was kneeling down beside a crumpled body. And even if Will didn’t love the woman anymore, even if she had torn him apart and told him so many horrible things about himself, even though she didn’t understand him and had used him, it didn’t stop Will’s blood from running cold and turning into a slush in his veins. “Mom.”

“Molly,” Will gasped, scrambling to his feet and slipping in the snow as he raced to her.

“Don’t touch her Will,” Hannibal ordered in a commanding tone, but Will couldn’t stop, couldn’t hear Hannibal over his own heartbeat. Hannibal pushed himself from the snow and shot a glare at Jack, who looked on in shock from where he now stood at the bottom of the stairs. “Walter, stop him, please.” Hannibal pushed down the feeling of being impressed as the young boy quickly jumped into action, leaving his mother’s side to catch Will. Hannibal rushed over and knelt down beside the woman, eyes trailing over the mess of blood. “Don’t let him come over here, Walter.”

“Save her, Hannibal,” Will ordered, a panicking in his tone that made Hannibal bite his tongue in jealousy. “Please save her.”

Hannibal glanced over his shoulder to see Will's face crumbled, tears in his eyes as his son held him back with a tight hug. With a deep breath, Hannibal returned his eyes to Molly, pushing his sweater sleeves up and out of the way.

"Walter, come here please," Hannibal ordered as he reached for Molly's blood soaked shirt, tearing at the hole in the fabric until he could see where the bullet had hit her. "Will, stay away." Blood was soaking the driveway, rolling down it in long smears, catching up ice on its way to the gutter. Too much blood. Hannibal wasn't truly sure if there was much he could do. "Walter, elevate her feet please. She's going into shock." The boy knelt down and lifted his mother's feet onto his lap, hands tight around her ankles.

Hannibal could hear the yells behind him between Jack and Will, but he pushed it aside to focus. He ripped his sweater up and over his head, pressing it to the gunshot wound in her ribs, holding it down tightly.

"She needs an ambulance, Jack!" Hannibal shouted out over the yelling and the night fell silent. "Someone call for medics!"

Jack jumped on it, phone from his pocket. "I need medical sent to..."

Hannibal blocked out the words once more, stealing a glance at the boy who is still holding to his mother's feet. There was not much else that Hannibal could do other than keep the pressure on the wound. He couldn't tell what the bullet had done inside of her. Chest wounds were tricky and there were a million things that could go wrong. Her lung could be collapsed, blood pressure could be dropping and the heart would eventually stop pumping, or it was possible that too much blood was gathering around her heart and that would stop it as well.

She had already closed her eyes, body still. Hannibal leaned over and placed his ear to her nose, watching her chest. Nothing. No air, no rise and fall of her chest. Absolutely nothing. He glanced at Walter once more who looked pale and sick.

Did he start CPR? He wouldn't be able to stop once he did. He wouldn't be able to run if he did. Was there a point to it? It would just make her lose more blood than she already had and that could cause her heart to stop as well if it ever started beating again. And the percentage of survival from CPR was low. Forty percent could be resuscitated and only twenty percent would live long term. Was there a point?

"Get out of here," Jack said.

Will froze as his eyes left Hannibal and went to Jack who stood numbly to the side, eyes still on Molly. "What?" he asked, voice small and broken.

"You three get out of here. I will tell them what happened," Jack instructed. "You don't need to be here when the team shows up."

"Will," Hannibal called, looking over his shoulder.

Will inhaled deeply and gave a nod, knowing the tone of voice that Hannibal was using. It was done. She was gone and the night was suddenly so very cold. And Walter was silent. Will wasn't exactly sure what to do to help the boy. He wasn't even sure what he was feeling exactly. There were so many feelings left in the air that he wasn't sure which ones were his and which ones belonged to everyone else and it was fogging his mind up.

"Blame it on me Jack," Hannibal said as he rose to his feet. "Tell them I did it. Keep yourself clean." Hannibal wiped the blood from his hands on the front of his slacks, leaving dark streaks over his thighs.

"I can't tell them that you killed her," Jack stated, eyes finally leaving the dead woman and going to Hannibal.

"What is one more murder charge to me?" Hannibal questioned, taking Will's wrist in his hand and pulling on it. "We need to go."

"I-I can't leave," Will stated with a small sob in his voice. "Molly- Molly-"

"She's gone Will," Hannibal said gently. "We can't stay here. We need to go." He gave another tug and Will nodded, licking his lips. He needed to be strong. "We'll take the boy somewhere safe."

"If I tell them that you did this, they are going to come after you," Jack pointed out, looking between the two of them.

"I know," Hannibal answered with a determined nod. "But you don't need this against you."

"Why are you offering to help me?" Jack asked.

"Will, get the boy in the car."

"What about the dogs?" Will asked, Hannibal able to feel the numbness in the empath's body.

"I will take care of the dogs," Jack assured. "Get going. You don't have long before you can't use this road anymore. It's the only one in and out to the main highway. Will, I'm sorry."

"Will, get the boy into the car," Hannibal instructed once more, pushing Will towards Walter. Will stumbled slightly and Hannibal watched as the young boy released his death hold on his mother, took his father's hand and pulled him towards the car. Hannibal looked back to Jack with a frown. "We will have to take a rain check on dinner. Wrap up your hand." Hannibal turned around to head to the car, but stopped at Jack's question.

"Why are you doing this for me?"

"We were friends once upon a time," Hannibal answered softly. "I'd like to think we still are. If not, consider this for old time's sake."

"Please make sure Will knows I'm sorry. For everything."

"I'm sure your guilt will be enough of a consolation for him."

Hannibal climbed into the driver's seat of the car and the door closed with a thud. He held out his hand to Will in the passenger seat and Will slowly passed him the keys. Hannibal started the car and pulled out of the driveway, leaving Jack standing next to a woman's body in the snow.

"Alana's?" Will asked as the streets stopped blurring into one and became something he recognized through the haze that was still over his mind, emotions far too thick and muggy. There wasn't an answer, but Hannibal pulled the car up the long driveway and towards the fountain. He threw the car in park with a jolt and turned to look over Will with concerned eyes. "I'm alright," Will answered softly, just wishing he could sleep. He just wanted today to be over. He wanted all of the things that were in his mind's eyes to disappear for a few hours, even if the sleep was restless. "Just overloaded."

Hannibal gave a nod and turned off the car. His door closed behind him and he rushed for the front door. Will glanced into the back of the car where Walter had fallen asleep against the door. Will climbed from the car and went over to Walter's side, opening the door carefully. The boy startled awake and Will gave him a small smile, but didn't say a word.

He undid Walter's seat belt and pulled the boy from the car. Walter wrapped his legs and arms around Will's body and Will shifted at the weight of the not so small anymore child. He closed the car door awkwardly with his elbow and carried his son up to the front door that had finally been opened.

Margot stood there with wide eyes, looking over the three of them, eyes taking a second look at Hannibal. "We need help," Hannibal said with a hint of dislike in his tone, but Margot only gave a small nod and moved aside to let them into the house.

"What happened?"

"An altercation with Jack Crawford," Hannibal explained. "Are my things still in my room?"

"Yes. Jack found you?" Margot asked curiously, following them into the house.

"Killed the boy's mother."

Margot stopped and looked over Will who still held to Walter's sleeping body. "You took the blame for it, didn't you? Like you did for my brother?"

"Of course he did," Will answered softly to not wake Walter.

"Hello Alana," Hannibal said in a faux warmness as the woman appeared at the top of a staircase.

"What are you doing here, Hannibal?" Alana asked as she made her way gracefully down the stairs. Her eyes took in the killer's blood stained clothes before she looked over to a worn looking Will who was struggling to keep a hold on a child that Alana assumed was Walter.

"I need you to watch the kid," Hannibal answered as he made his way to where his own room had been. Will followed after him swiftly, surprise in his bones. Alana and Margot looked about as shocked as Will felt.

"What?" Will asked as Hannibal opened the door to his room and turned on the light. Will followed Hannibal in and watched as the killer went about shoving his things into a black backpack that had been left untouched in the room.

"Walter can sleep here," Alana said gently, voice apologizing and Will guessed that Margot had explained what had happened to Molly. "Go put him in the bed. We'll take care of him."

Will hesitated, but at a kind smile from Alana, he obeyed. He set Walter down and Walter helped get himself back under the sheets, quickly asleep again. Will stepped back, hands trembling.

"We can't drag him along with us," Hannibal explained, moving closer to Will and looking over the still desensitized man. "I have a safe house in Vermont. We'll stay there until the noise dies down and it's safe to come back. We can collect the boy then and head to Europe. We'll be safer there." Will didn't say a word and Hannibal gave a small sigh. "That is, if you want to come with me. You can stay here. Say that you escaped. Or I let you go. Whatever you need to do, Will."

Will shook his head and lowered himself onto the edge of the bed, chest tight and knees weak. Shattered. That was what everything was now. Shattered into the smallest of pieces and Will wasn't sure if he could put them all back together again.

He had wanted Molly gone. He would have been happy to never speak to her again. But he didn't want her dead. She was an amazing woman and an amazing mother that had been ripped away from his son. This wasn't how it was supposed to work. There were supposed to be bitter fights and letters between lawyers. There were supposed to be judges and dark glares across a courtroom as they battled for their child. It wasn't supposed to be so one sided.

Hannibal waited for a moment more, Will simply looked over Walter and when there was no answer, Hannibal went for the ensuite bathroom to clean up. He pulled his bloody clothes off and then scrubbed at his hands and arms in the sink before glancing down at the decently made knife wound in his side. With a deeply annoyed breath, he hurriedly cleaned it and put some light bandaging that would hopefully hold until he could find something more substantial. He pulled on some of his other clothes and tossed the bloody clothes into the trash. He tied up the bag, bringing it with him from the bathroom, eyes landing on Will who was reaching out towards the sleeping child.

Walter was pulled from sleep with a hand in his hair and he blinked in the light that was on in the bedroom. He looked over his dad, who wore a sad kind of smile, but the sleep in his system made it difficult for him to exactly place the expression.

"Dad?" he asked softly, trying to sit up just a bit.

"Hush," Will shushed softly. "You're going to stay here for a while. Alana and Margot are going to take care of you until it's safe for me to come back. Do you understand?"

"How long will that be?" Walter was a little more awake now, eyes going behind his dad and to where two women were standing. Both were tall, thin and beautiful with dark hair and bright blue eyes. Both looked worn and tired and Walter felt bad that he was imposing.

"I don't know," Will replied honestly and Walter gave a nod. "But I will come back for you."

"Promise?" Walter asked in a frightened tone.

"I promise."

Walter gave another nod and exhaled deeply through his nose, eyes looking around the room until they stopped on Hannibal who looked ready to run, ready to take on the world. "*Rūpinkis mano tėčiu,"* Walter said into the room. Will's eyes widened and he looked up at Hannibal who seemed to understand completely. Hannibal gave a single, sober nod. "*Jis mėgsta apsimesti stipresniu nei yra.*"

"Will, we need to go," Hannibal said, as he put his pack over his shoulder. He turned back to Alana and Margot. "We need a new car. Jack's going to tell them which one I took. I need somewhere to ditch it."

“The Verger Estate has extensive grounds,” Margot informed in a voice that Hannibal took to mean that hiding the car wouldn’t be any sort of issue. “We have a car you can use as well.”

“Thank you.” Hannibal glanced back over his shoulder to where Will still lingered beside his son and he nearly felt guilty for ripping Will away from the boy. Hannibal turned back and went to the bed, hand taking Will’s shoulder firmly. “We need to go. We don’t have time to waste.” Will looked up at Hannibal with a small bittersweet half smile that broke Hannibal’s heart. He leaned down and placed a kiss to Will’s lips in hopes of making the smile a little more on the sweet side. “Come along love. You can rest in the car.”

Will leaned over Walter and placed a kiss to the boy’s head before getting to his feet and leaving the bedside with Hannibal behind him. Alana followed them from the room, but Margot stayed behind stating that she would stay with Walter to be there if he had nightmares.

“We have a truck in the barn,” Alana explained as she led them back through the house and to the front door. “The workers use it.” She stopped at the front door, a hand firm on it so that they couldn’t leave, so that they had to listen. Or at least, Hannibal had to listen. “The spare key is in the bumper. Leave your car there and I will have someone take care of it in the morning.”

“Thank you Alana,” Will said, pulling her into a hug. Alana returned it, though it was short lived, neither one of them really over exactly what had happened between them so long ago. So many emotions that had never been sorted out and this was in no way the night to do it. “As soon as everything settles, I will get Walter.”

Alana gave a nod before her gaze went to Hannibal and narrowed. “You can only use the truck if you do something for me,” Alana said and Will stepped out of the way, feeling awkwardly out of place with how pointed the comment was. Hannibal’s eyebrows rose as he waited for her terms. “You break that promise.”

Hannibal’s lips pursed as he regarded the request. “The one I made to kill you?”

“That one,” Alana responded with a nod, hand still firmly on the door to keep them in place. “If not, I will call the police myself and tell them exactly where you’re going.”

“I have other safe houses, Alana. More accounts than they could ever find. It would not be difficult for me to change my plans.”

“If you want my silence, the boy to stay safe and the truck, you have to go back on your promise.”

Will looked over Hannibal and could see the detest in his eyes. Will didn’t think it was from the idea of not being able to kill Alana, but from the idea of going back on a promise. Will knew that Hannibal didn’t break promises, no matter what they were. They were fulfilled completely and he wondered if that had come about because of Mischa as well. So much of this man was driven by his sister and it wouldn’t surprise Will if this was another aspect of Hannibal the young girl had shaped.

“I will not make good on my promise,” Hannibal finally settled on.

Alana gave a nod and removed herself from the door, letting Hannibal out and into the night. Will went to follow and stopped when Alana caught his arm, looking back at her. “Stay safe. Walter needs you.”

Will didn’t say a word, just gently pulled his arm free and left the house, hearing the door shut behind him. There was an emptiness that was settling in his chest at the idea of leaving Walter here. He would be safe, Will knew he would, but that didn’t stop the twisting feeling that he was abandoning his son.

The key was just where Alana said it was. With bloody clothes left in the old car and the very little Hannibal had packed shoved into the truck, the engine rattled on, old and used but sturdy. The truck pulled back out onto the main road and Will moved across the bench until he was beside Hannibal, leaning against him with his head on the killer’s shoulder, eyes shutting.

“Thank you for trying to help her,” he whispered into the cab. “You didn’t have to.” He yawned and reached out to turn the heater up so he wouldn’t have to see his breath in the car. He removed his glasses and placed them on the dash.

“You’re welcome,” Hannibal whispered back, a hand leaving the steering wheel so that he could wrap an arm around Will’s waist and pull him closer. “Try to get some sleep. We’ve got about eight hours ahead of us and I’m not stopping unless we need gas.”

Atsipalaiduok. Tvirtai laikykite rankas. Giliai įkvėpkite: Relax. Keep your hands steady. Deep breath.

Eik iš čia, mano meile. Man viskas bus gerai. Išveskite savo šeimą: Get out of here, my love. Everything will be fine. Get your family out.

Rūpinkis mano tėčiu. Jis mėgsta apsimesti stipresniu nei yra: Take care of my dad. He likes to pretend to be stronger than he is.

Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

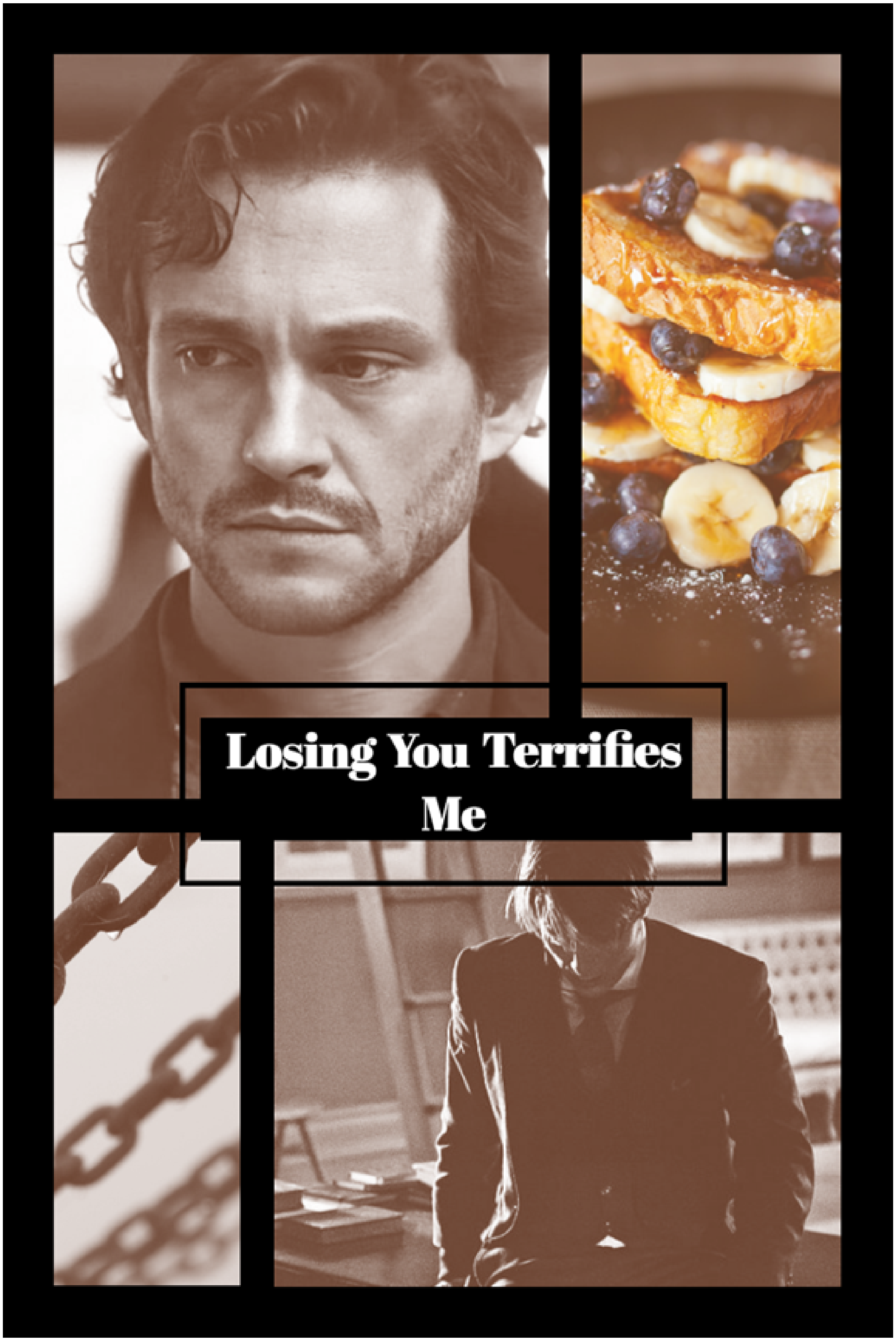
“It wasn’t real.”

Alana blinked at the harsh words, but they weren’t mad or hurt. Just jarring in how cold they were.

Chapter Notes

This is the song for this chapter apparently.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTGwyWzMpfU



The nightmares did come with a vengeance. White dresses turned red with a knife. Corpses with thirteen stab wounds dancing within a salt circle, a wonderfully kind woman who had done the very best she could for her son dead in a driveway, left pale like the moonlight.

Walter jolted awake with a heaving breath, eyes wide as he tried to take in the room he was in. A room he didn't recognize. A bed that wasn't his. His eyes darted up at movement from a chair and he saw a pretty woman, with arms folded tightly around her small frame, step towards him.

"Where's my dad?" Walter gasped out, mind running a million miles an hour, trying to remember everything that was a dirty blur.

"Shh," the woman said, sitting on the edge of the bed. Her hand outstretched towards Walter and Walter flinched away. She gave a small, tight smile and lowered her hand back to her lap. "Your dad went away for a little bit. He'll be back soon." Walter tipped his head at her monotone, soft voice. A voice he vaguely remembered. "Breakfast should be ready by now. Would you like something to eat?"

Walter gave a small nod, trying to take in more of the room. Large, fancy, expensive. Something Walter had never had the privilege to live in before. Not even hotel rooms were this nice. Not even his grandparent's house was this nice and Walter had considered that place horribly over the top.

The woman, who Walter could faintly remember being called something like Margaret or maybe Madeline, stood from the bed and went for the door of the large room. Walter scrambled from the bed and followed after her through the large house. She pushed open the door to a room and let Walter step in.

It was white, clinically so, and a large table filled the room, littered with vases of flowers and a chandelier hanging over the top of it. There was a large spread of food and drinks on one side of the table and Walter was met with the kind smile from another woman who was just as pretty as Magnolia was. Walter shook his head, face scrunched up. No. That wasn't right either.

Across the table sat a small boy eating away mindlessly with a book on the table, open and being read happily. Walter stared at the dark haired boy for a moment more. He couldn't have been more than five or six if Walter had to guess, which was about when he had started to learn to read, but books like Green Eggs and Ham, not full length novels.

"Walter," the woman, whose name he was pretty certain stated with an M, said, motioning to the table with a sweep of her hand. "This is my wife, Alana."

"Wife?" Walter asked curiously, looking back to the woman whose name he did recognize from conversations between Will and his mother. Alana gave a small nod, not looking at all offended by the judging question. "Nice to meet you."

"And this is my son, Morgan," the woman continued, stepping over to where the boy still sat consumed in his book. She snatched the book up and Morgan jumped, head now up with a frown. "No books at the table, Morgan. You know the rules."

"But Mom-"

"No buts," Margot, that was her name, interrupted the child's whining before sitting beside him.

Walter frowned. Morgan was one of those spoiled rich kids. Walter knew the type, the type that liked to make fun of him at school. The type that picked on him for his oversized clothes that were bought at thrift stores and hammy downs from his cousins. The type of kid that could get away with anything just because their parents had money.

“Come sit down Walter,” Alana said, smile kind as she patted the table beside here where another place setting was.

“I like Wally,” Walter muttered as he slowly stepped over to the table and sat down, looking over the food that was in front of him. Eggs, bacon, sausage, toast, french toast, pancakes, waffles, orange juice, apple juice, some other things that he couldn’t exactly name, but all of it looked good and his stomach was growling more the longer his eyes looked over the food. “Do you eat like this every day?”

“Please, have some. Don’t be shy, Wally,” Alana insisted as she took a sip from her coffee mug.

Walter inhaled deeply, before looking up and meeting Morgan’s insanely blue eyes that were looking over him curiously. Walter frowned, but kept the instinct to stick out his tongue to himself. He reached for the orange juice and poured himself a glass and then dug into the food. He didn’t have dinner the night before and this looked wonderful.

It reminded him of what his dad would cook for him on the weekends. Every Saturday morning Will would get up early and make them breakfast. Will wasn’t really the best cook and the eggs normally came out a bit crunchy from shells and the bacon a little burnt, but Walter didn’t mind. And it let his mother sleep in, which he knew his mother needed. She liked to stay up watching tv far too late into the night.

“Morgan, please hurry. Your classes start in a moment,” Margot instructed as she took a drink from her own glass of orange juice. Only, Walter knew that wasn’t quite right. It looked like orange juice, but it was in an ornate glass, tall and skinny. It had alcohol in it. He could smell the faint yeastiness of the alcohol, something close to freshy baked bread. Or maybe it was just the freshly baked bread, but Walter knew there was a more sour note to the drink than there was to the bread.

Morgan gave a nod and took another bite of his piece of toast, the only thing on the boy’s plate much to Walter’s bewilderment. But if this was what was for breakfast everyday then maybe Walter would get tired of eating it too, though he doubted it.

He took a bite of the bacon and it was like a pit had been opened up in his stomach. He downed the bacon easily, jaw working hard to keep up with how quickly he was shoving food into his mouth like he had never eaten before. He was going to make himself sick, but he didn’t care. He was starving, could feel a faintness in his limbs from lack of food, a tingling in the tips of his fingers.

Walter stopped with embarrassment coloring his cheeks at a laugh from Alana. “The food will still be here when you finish your plate,” she explained and Walter sat up, lowering his fork and wiping at his mouth with the cloth napkin that was beside his plate. He hesitantly reached out and took a sip of his juice before slowing his pace of shoveling food into his mouth to something a bit more polite.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered. “I didn’t eat last night.”

“You don’t need to apologize, Wally,” Alana assured.

Margot got from her chair, hand taking Morgan’s shoulder. “Let’s get you to your classes, Morgan. You can come riding with me when you’re done with your arithmetic.”

Morgan jumped down from the table and grabbed the book that his mother had taken from him before stopping beside Walter with a curious look. Walter did his best to keep his face neutral, to not look like he was jealous or upset with the small child who couldn't help the life he had been born into. A life that Walter was suddenly very envious of... Maybe just for the food.

"Would you want to come look at the horses?" Morgan asked, much to Walter's surprise. He was being nice? That didn't mean that Walter had to like him. And of course they would have horses. Which rich family didn't? This was like some weird romantic show his mother liked to watch. Something like...oh what was the one she liked to watch called? Ever After or something Cinderella like. Walter hadn't paid much attention, but his father had claimed to enjoy it when the movie was finished and the popcorn bowl was put in the sink to be washed.

"How about we let him get settled?" Alana offered in a voice that told Walter that he probably wouldn't be looking at the horses any time soon. "Maybe tomorrow you can show him the horses. Go to your studies."

"Alright." Morgan gave a small nod, book being tucked under his arm. Margot pushed him along and to the door. "Bye Wally. See you later."

"Bye," Walter whispered as he watched the two leave the room. He stared at the door for a moment longer before he went back to eating, the eggs not crunchy in the slightest. He could sense those powerful blue eyes watching him closely, but he didn't look up, just swallowed and got another bite ready. "My dad's mentioned you before."

"Has he?" Alana asked curiously and Walter nodded, taking another bite of eggs before his hand reached across the table to grab a sausage link to shove whole into his mouth without a second thought. "Then you know about me?"

"Not much," Walter replied through his mouthful of food. "I know you're a doctor. One like Hannibal."

"You know Hannibal?"

Walter gave a shrug, reaching for the maple syrup to pour it over his french toast. He was starting to get full, but he didn't care. It felt good to eat, it filled a hole that was in his chest. Something very cold and very empty that he wanted gone.

"I know of him, like anyone else. I've read the books and articles, but they contradict each other too much for me to know which are true." Walter's fork clanked against the plate as he aggressively used it to cut at a corner of the bread and he put it in his mouth, ignoring the way the syrup got all over the white table cloth. "I would assume that his own writings on himself are more truthful than anything else I have read. But he does have a sense of arrogance and narcissism in his words. He likes to blow his own horn."

Alana watched the boy curiously as he downed the rest of the food that was on his plate before reaching hectically for more as if he had been lost in a cave in the middle of the desert and this was the first time he had seen food in weeks.

"What makes you say that?" she asked, head tipped to the side at another shrug from the boy.

"Aren't all killers like that?" He paused in his scarfing and looked up at Alana. "His words are one of accomplishment, of being better than everyone else. Egotistical, conceited, an inflated sense of self-importance."

“You sound like Will,” Alana muttered before taking a sip of her drink.

“I’ve lived with him for three years. I'm sure some of it has rubbed off. He is my dad after all.” The words held a bit of sharpness in them and Alana leaned forward in her chair.

“Have you met Hannibal before?”

Walter shook his head. “Just last night. He was easy enough to deal with. You just play to his ego and he sings. That’s what my dad did in the past, right? To get Hannibal to help you with the Red Dragon case?” Alana listened carefully, intrigued by how much the child knew about everything that surrounded him and Alana was certain that Will hadn’t initiated it. The boy had sought it out on his own. Alana gave Walter a nod when he looked over for an answer. “You just say things he likes to hear.”

“I don’t think he’s quite that simple,” Alana pointed out. “He was still the one in control.”

“But he wasn’t going to kill me. I knew he would come back eventually. As soon as my dad came back I knew he would be around the corner. It would be the natural progression of events if Freddie Lounds wrote anything true. Murder husbands and what not. I suppose they are.”

“What did you say to him that made you so endearing?” Alana pushed her coffee mug away, fully invested in what Will’s child had to say. Walter really had taken on a lot of aspects of Will. Will’s sharp mind, his observations, his way of explaining things in so simple of terms that it felt like you were being talked down to. “Was it the Lithuanian. I heard you speaking it last night. What did you say to him?”

“We had long conversations in it. You would have to be more specific. But you have to make yourself sympathetic. Or that’s what my dad said. You have to be useful and look human and they won’t hurt you. If you can look human then they can’t turn you into the faceless doll that they turn everyone else into. They can’t find the courage to kill you.”

Alana wasn’t sure if that applied to Hannibal exactly. Nothing fully applied to Hannibal. He was a mashup of different morals and ideals that made him a patchwork man that no one would ever fully understand, not even Will Graham would ever fully be able to take apart the man in the suits with the accent and the blood stained hands.

“I would like to spend the day with you, Wally. If that is ok with you.”

“What for?” Walter asked, frozen in his eating and full attention and eyes on Alana. “I’m fine.”

“I think you’re in denial.”

“About what?”

“About the events that occurred last night,” Alana answered gently, reaching out to take his hand. Walter pulled away and out of reach with a reproachful expression. Another thing he took after Will, Alana mused. “You do remember don’t you.”

Walter’s brows furrowed at the not exactly full question and he gave a small, hesitant nod. “I know she’s dead,” he replied softly. “I’m not in denial.”

“You’re to the point of acceptance rather quickly. Mourning periods can last up to several months,” Alana said, sitting back in her chair so that Walter wouldn’t pull back from her any further than he did. It almost reminded her of Abigail. She had been cold too. Too calculating and not enough feelings. He needed to feel to heal. “There’s nothing wrong with being sad and-”

“I know there’s not. That doesn’t mean that I have to be.” Walter moved in his chair to be further away from the woman, wishing the conversation would end and he could just go back to his room. He didn’t enjoy someone digging into his head. No one could understand him, he didn’t even understand himself, so there was no point in trying to understand. He wasn’t sure why he wasn’t sad, didn’t know why he was so calm after having watched his mother be taken from him. He didn’t know why he was so accepting of the events that had just happened, but it was much easier to deal with when they were muted and pushed away so he could look at them critically than if they were overwhelming his senses like they liked to do to his dad. “Don’t analyze me, Dr. Bloom. I’m not a textbook.”

“No, you’re not,” Alana agreed sweetly, unable to get over the fact that the boy was nearly a carbon copy of Will. What had Will done to the boy to make him like this? Or maybe it was more that Walter wanted to be like Will? The boy did look up to his father. That much was apparent. “But I feel like you’re suffering from Emotional Numbness.”

“What’s that?” Walter asked cautiously, eyeing Alana nervously.

“Emotional numbing can happen as a result of physical or emotional pain. In an attempt to protect yourself from being hurt again, it’s not uncommon to disconnect, detach, or numb out feelings related to the situation,” Alana explained, doing her best to keep her tone calm and light instead of impersonal. “When this happens, you may feel temporary relief that allows you to move on with your life, but over time, this protective shield can begin to get in the way of connecting with others and getting in touch with feelings. You can’t stay in this forever. You have to come out and deal with what happened.”

“Deal with what?” Walter challenged. “My mother was killed by a cop who I thought would save me from a serial killer. The serial killer tried to save my mom and my dad is hooking up with the serial killer and both happen to be men. I would say that I am dealing with it fairly well, all things considered.”

Walter got from the table and Alana’s eyes stayed on him, much to his dislike. He wanted to be alone, away from everyone. He was detached, but it was what he needed to be and no therapist was going to change him from that. He detached to stay safe.

He detached when he found that family dead. He detached when he was taken hostage by Jordan and Casey. He detached when he found out that Danny had been taken away by the state and he would never see him again because Danny was as screwed up as Jordan after a psych evaluation. He detached when Hannibal brandished a knife at him. He detached when his mother had been shot. That was what made it so he could function, do what others couldn’t.

He stopped Danny from seeing those bodies, he called his dad for help. He stayed calm while blind folded and gagged. He helped his mother while he could and stopped his father from losing himself over Molly. He was the rock, the steady bluff against the storm. He detached for others, not himself. He would stay detached if it helped others.

“Do you have a problem with your father being with a man?” Alana questioned, curious that that seemed to be the thing that Walter was most focused on. Walter shifted slightly, eyes down on the floor, lips bit between his teeth. “You seemed to have a problem with Margot mentioning we were married earlier as well.” Walter still didn’t answer, but his jaw clenched and his hand became fists. “Family reconfiguration can involve transitional tension. It can be hard to move from being born into a heterosexually formed family and having everything change to a homosexually formed family. It might be something that you don't want to believe or accept.”

“I suspected,” Walter admitted softly. “Will wasn’t like the other men that my mom dated, but he was nice. I thought he was shy. But after he came back from being with Hannibal I knew he was different, but I didn’t say anything to anybody. It was just an idea. I didn’t want to think about it.”

“Because you didn’t want to think about the consequences, about what it would mean for you mom and dad?” Alana supplied receiving a mute nod. “Did you feel guilty, hiding that from your mother?” A small nod. “Do you want to talk about that?”

“No.” Walter’s voice was abrupt and biting. “I don’t.”

“Do you have an issue with Margot and I being together?”

“No,” Walter muttered, hands unclenching and clenching back up. “I don’t care that you’re gay. I have-I had friends with gay parents.” The correction made Alana tip her head.

“But you are upset with Will for being gay?” Alana voiced. It wasn’t really a question, more of a statement, but she didn’t want to upset the boy more than he was.

“I don’t know.”

“Are you more upset that he was having an affair while still married to your mom?”

“It doesn’t matter anymore if he was,” Walter stated, finally looking up, eyes cold and blocked. There was no emotion in them, nothing that Alana could pick up on. “What happened is what happened. It’s his life, not mine. If he wants to screw that killer, then he can. It’s not my place to say anything.”

Alana was silent for a moment, going over the boy’s words in her head, trying to pull together a conclusion. “Are you sad because you don’t know if what your mom and dad had was real?”

“It wasn’t real.”

Alana blinked at the harsh words, but they weren’t mad or hurt. Just jarring in how cold they were. “Those good memories you have with both of them were real. They were real moments. It might be over now, but that doesn’t mean that they didn’t happen and they weren’t real when you were experiencing them. They haven’t lost their reality just because your father likes another man.”

Walter sighed. “I know that. I meant their relationship wasn’t real. But like I said, it doesn’t matter anymore. That part of my life is gone and this is my new reality that I have to navigate. I’ve done it before, I can do it again. My mom has been through enough boyfriends and divorces. I know how to pick up the pieces and move on. And I still have my dad. He’ll come back for me and we’ll be a family.”

“With Hannibal,” Alana reminded with a strained tone. Walter had been through too much in his short life, talked far too much like an adult, shut himself away too much like a teenager who had depression. He wasn’t depressed. He was in full clarity of the situation and it stunned Alana how a boy of his age was able to hold himself together like this. It was wrong. He was going to hurt himself. He would be damaged if it continued that way.

“With Hannibal.” Walter nodded.

“And you’re ok with that?”

“Do I have a choice?”

“You always have a choice, Wally,” Alana assured. “Will will give you that choice.”

“I’m ok with it.”

Before Alana could speak again, the door opened and Morgan stepped in, looking between them. “Wally, did you still want to see the horses?” the young boy asked curiously.

“Morgan, leave him alone,” Margot warned from somewhere in the next room.

“I want to see the horses,” Walter said quickly, anything to get out of this room and away from Alana.

The tv blared and Will stared at it blankly in the new home he was in. He hadn’t bothered taking in the details, his mind still far too cloudy to care. God, he wanted the tv off. The sound was too loud, making his ears want to bleed, but he couldn’t find the strength to move and fix the problem.

The light in the room was too bright. It was hot. What was this feeling? He was overheating in the fluorescents, melting like ice cream in the summer. Burning on the sun, but he didn’t move.

Anxiety was creeping into his system, keeping him still and silent. Or maybe it hadn’t really left, just drumming through him continuously. It was making it hard to breathe. His chest was constricted. He wasn’t himself. His mind wasn’t his. He was letting himself be swept up into too many swirling emotions that made him sick. It was overwhelming. An information download overload, but there was nothing to pull himself from it.

And then everything was cold. So very cold. The sun had shifted to the dark side of the moon, temperatures arctic. Will sputtered, gasping, hand going to his face and wiping water from his skin. He shivered at the continuing spray and was met with worried red eyes.

“Stop slipping away from me, Will,” Hannibal stated softly, a hand reaching out to take Will’s face. “You weren’t responsive. I’m sorry for the cold shower.”

Will blinked and glanced around at a modest looking bathroom that was nowhere near as fantastical as the other homes that they had lived in before. He shivered in his dripping clothes and Hannibal reached up to turn the water off.

His breathing slowly settled and he took Hannibal’s outstretched hand to help pull himself from the bottom of the shower.

“Please stop retreating into your own head. I don’t want to lose you.” Hannibal pulled Will close, ignoring the wet clothes and hugged the man tightly.

“Hannibal,” Will sighed through chattering teeth. Hannibal pulled him from the bathroom and Will found himself in a decent sized master bedroom with a king sized bed, but again, nothing too outrageously expensive. The walls were a nice white and the bed spread a green so deep it was nearly black. “I’m sorry. I just... I’m so muddled right now.” He let Hannibal’s hands work his shirt up and over his head and then pulled at the pants around his waist until Will was fully undressed and clutching his arms, still shivering and wishing he was back under the glare of the fake fluorescent sun in the living room. “I have everyone in my head. Everyone wants attention and wants me to feel what they’re feeling. It’s... overwhelming.”

“Would you like to talk through it?” Hannibal asked affectionately as he found more clothing for Will. Will watched Hannibal closely as he moved, fetching things from the closet. Things that Will wouldn’t normally wear, but he didn’t fight as Hannibal held the clothing out to him to put on.

“Jack’s there,” Will muttered, letting boxers be pulled on and snug around his hips. “He’s guilty and apologetic, but I don’t really want to deal with it.” Next came a pair of slacks that fit Will a little too well and Will nearly wanted to ask how Hannibal had gotten his measurements, but figured that there had been multiple ways for him to obtain the measurements if he truly wanted them. “And then there’s Molly too. Betrayal and pain. Hurt. Depression. She’s a mess.” And then a button up shirt that was tailored as well. Will closed his eyes with a sigh as Hannibal buttoned it up and then pulled on the sleeves before buttoning those as well. “And Walter is closed off. There’s anger there, but not much else.”

“And me?” Hannibal questioned, pulling at the collar and straightening it, but letting a few of the buttons hang open at the top. Hannibal’s hands rested on Will’s chest and he gave a small smile.

“You’re a breath of fresh air,” Will answered truthfully. “A clarity that I desperately need.”

“Do you have a migraine?” One of Hannibal’s hands rose and he caressed at Will’s cheek gently with the back of his fingers. Will closed his eyes and shook his head. “Good. We should get you something to eat. You haven’t eaten anything in a while.”

“I’m not in the mood to eat, Hannibal,” Will whispered. “Have you slept? I don’t remember much of what happened when we got here.”

“I’m fine,” Hannibal assured, letting Will go. “You need something to eat, Will. No fighting me. Something light. Come with me.”

Hannibal left the room and Will glanced around the bedroom once more before leaving and following Hannibal. It was a long hallway that welcomed him with hardwood floors and generic art on the walls. There were two more bedrooms and then another bathroom in the same hall.

The hardwood continued through the whole house and Will turned the corner of the hall to find himself in the large open concept home. A living room that looked more comfortable than what Hannibal would have liked, but one that Will found rather welcoming. And a dining room with a humble table for maybe a family of four. The kitchen was on the larger side, but still nothing compared to other places that they had lived before.

“This... seems a little toned down for you,” Will muttered, heading over to the kitchen to lean against the tiled counter while Hannibal rummaged through a brown paper bag on the far counter. “Did you go shopping?”

“You’ve been sleeping for a while. I was a bit surprised to find you in the living room when I got home.” Hannibal turned around with a banana and passed it over to Will who slowly took it. He didn’t really want to eat it, but it would make Hannibal happy and he really did need to eat something. He hadn’t eaten since breakfast the day before. Hannibal waited for Will to take a bite of the banana before he went to work, putting food away. “And yes. This place is a little... toned down,” Hannibal agreed, the words sounding odd from his lips. “Not every property I own is a palace, Will. We need something that helps us blend in, not just for comfort.”

“You said you had multiple safe houses and different accounts?” Will asked around his mouthful of food, watching the muscles in Hannibal’s back work from under his tight dress shirt.

“When I was taken into custody they seized my assets. The ones I let them find,” Hannibal explained. “I have fingers in many pies and am very good at exploiting weaknesses to get what I need. I have endless resources for my needs and many contacts that wouldn’t dare turn on me. I have endless aliases and paperwork to prove all of it. I can be whoever I want whenever I want. And I have the means to change my appearance if needed.”

“Change your appearance?” Will asked curiously, head tipped to the side.

Hannibal gave a small nod as he put the shopping into the fridge. “I have had work done previously by my own hand, though it wasn’t much. Things here and there.”

Will’s face scrunched up as he looked over Hannibal who met his gaze without anything to hold back. “I’ve seen pictures of you when you were younger. You don’t look different.”

“I haven’t done anything extensive on my face, though I can if the needs arise. I’d rather not though.” Hannibal sighed and moved around the counter to stand beside Will. He held out his left hand to Will and Will gave a confused look. “This is probably the biggest change that I’ve had performed for convenience of slipping away.”

“Your hand looks normal,” Will muttered, taking the hand into his own two so he could look over it closely.

"I had polydactylism.”

“Polydac...” Will trailed off on the foreign word, still looking over Hannibal’s hand.

“I had two middle fingers. I removed one of them. Easier to blend in without an extra ligament.”

Will pulled Hannibal’s hand closer and looked between his fingers, finding a dim scar there. “I never would have-”

“Some of my earlier crimes were done with the extra finger. I think it would be difficult to pin them on me when they’re looking for someone with six fingers,” Hannibal continued. “Though the hand is a bit stiffer now. Makes it a little difficult to play the harpsichord.”

“What else did you have done?”

“You don’t need to worry yourself over them,” Hannibal assured, placing a kiss to Will’s head.

Will smiled. “Was work done on your dick? Is that why you’re not telling me?”

Hannibal frowned. “No. I did not.”

“You sound so offended,” Will laughed. Will pulled Hannibal closer by his hand until he could kiss the man who was back in his normal three piece suit, something comforting in the odd prints, but the paisley was gone this time in place of a solid colored tie. “Don’t you dare change your face. I won’t love you anymore.”

“I’m glad to know that your love is shallow and skin deep,” Hannibal grumbled and Will gave another small laugh, kissing the man again reassuringly.

“You’re beautiful the way you are. I would hate to lose that, but your mind is much more important to me than your looks. I would pick your mind over your looks any day. If you need to change your appearance then I will accept you in any facet.” Will’s hands took Hannibal’s cheeks and he pulled Hannibal closer, tilting his head down so that he could kiss into Hannibal’s hair, trying to add definition to the fact that Will loved his mind. “I love you for being you, not for your dick and your cooking and your cheekbones and your irritating politeness, though they are all bonuses that I would miss, they do not make you you. They’re not what makes you you, Hannibal.”

“Thank you.” Hannibal lifted his head back up and pressed a lingering kiss to Will’s lips. “Are you feeling better?”

“Yes,” Will answered, letting himself be kissed thoroughly. “You clear my mind, make it so I don’t feel every emotion under the sun.” Will gasped as Hannibal’s hands clutched around him, pulling him in closer. “You know, we never did get to do anything last night.”

“You’re deflecting,” Hannibal warned, chest clenching when Will’s hips grinded against him. “You still haven’t come to terms with what happened last night.”

“I don’t want to come to terms with what happened last night,” Will muttered between their lips, trying to pull Hannibal closer. Will hadn't lied. Hannibal was a breath of fresh air when it came to his head. Even when he had encephalitis, Hannibal was his saving grace, who he went to for help and who he trusted. Hannibal was lucidity, clarity and coherence. “I just want you. That’s all I want. Don’t ruin the mood.”

“What about Walter?” Hannibal asked as his fingers tangled into Will’s damp curls.

“Hannibal,” Will warned darkly. “Do not ruin the mood.”

Hannibal gave a small sigh and broke away from Will, who frowned. “It is not healthy to ignore your own emotions, Will. I understand pushing others’ out, you don’t need all of those people in your head begging for your attention, but you can’t run away from your own feelings.”

Will pulled fully out of Hannibal’s grip and left his side, going to the living room and sitting back down on the couch. He pulled one of the throw pillows to himself and clutched it to his chest.

Hannibal stared after the man for a moment and then slowly stepped over to the back of the couch. Hannibal’s hands lowered to Will’s shoulders, who tensed under the new pressure. Hannibal’s fingers trailed under the collar of Will’s shirt against flushed skin and rubbed into the back of his neck and through his curls.

“What are you thinking about, Will?” Hannibal asked. “Let me help you navigate. I’m your paddle, remember?”

“That I’m a horrible father for coming with you,” Will replied strongly, catching Hannibal a bit off guard. He had expected to not get an answer at all, for Will to slowly sink back into himself. Hannibal didn’t want to see Will fade away again. A choice, a huge life decision was in front of the empath and those were the moments when Hannibal found Will’s mind deteriorating before it reset. Will had been doing so well. It had been several months and Hannibal knew that his own picture wasn’t complete in Will’s mind, but he didn’t need it to be as long as Will still knew him, knew his name. “Am I horrible for coming with you.”

“You feel like you abandoned your son,” Hannibal clarified, though he didn’t need to. Hannibal’s fingers tangled into Will’s curls and he could just make out the small sigh that the man gave as he relaxed.

“I suffer from an abandonment disorder among my many other mental illnesses that I have been blessed with.” Will snorted with laughter at his own words before continuing on. “I just don’t want to give Walter the same anxieties that I have. His mother is gone and what did I do? I didn’t comfort him. I panicked and was of absolutely no use.”

“It’s a natural reaction, Will,” Hannibal assured, fingers trailing back down, following the strong pulse in Will’s neck and enticing a shiver from the man, who clutched on tighter to the pillow he held.

“And then I dumped him off at a stranger’s house to run away with you,” Will pressed on, though his voice was a bit more airy now under Hannibal’s caresses. “I feel this overwhelming guilt and I don’t know if it’s mine or Jack’s, but it’s making me feel sick to my stomach.”

“You did what you needed to do for your son. You’ve had too many complications with the FBI, they’re not going to give you any more chances. Especially if Freddie Lounds gets a hold of the story.”

“God, she’s so-”

“Disagreeable,” Hannibal offered gently.

“-rude.”

Hannibal glanced down at Will with a curious look, fingers still tracing the vein in Will’s neck. Will tipped his head to the side enough to expose his neck more and Hannibal’s other hand slipped into Will’s curls, tugging at his head to give Hannibal more room to work. Will moaned at the aggressive movement, but didn’t argue.

Hannibal leaned down and his tongue trailed up the artery and then he pulled back enough to lightly blow on the mark he had made. Will’s shoulders tensed up and he shivered, arms tightening around the pillow in his grasp. A low, stifled choking sound came from Will’s throat and one of Will’s hands quickly shot to his mouth to cover it. Hannibal snatched at Will’s hand and pulled it away to find a reddened bite mark in Will’s thumb.

“Never cover your mouth in front of me again, do you understand?" Hannibal asked in Will’s ear. Will licked at his lips and gave a small nod with a whimper. “Good boy.” Hannibal tugged at Will’s curls again, dragging another sound out of Will that made him smile.

“Why didn’t you kill her?” Will asked in a wrecked voice, eyes shut tightly.

“I tried once, but I think you got your hands on her,” Hannibal breathed against Will’s neck, fingers digging further into his curls to hold him in place. “It’s a shame you didn’t actually kill her.”

“I wanted to,” Will admitted, shivering into Hannibal’s lips as he sucked at Will’s pulse. “She pepper sprayed me.”

Hannibal froze for a moment. “You never told me that.”

“It wasn’t-” Will broke off and cleared his throat, shifting slightly on the couch at the whisper of Hannibal’s words against his skin. “It wasn’t important.”

“You being hurt is always important to me, Will.” Will gave a small laugh as Hannibal nuzzled his nose into Will’s neck.

“Kill her for me?” Will asked into the open, the words stunning him. He wasn’t sure where they came from, but they were real and alive. Hannibal growled and bit into Will’s neck, exciting a gasp from Will. “I want her dead, Hannibal.”

“When everything settles down,” Hannibal agreed, tongue soothing the dark mark that he had made. “When she has outlived her usefulness.”

Will moaned as his head was pulled in the opposite direction and Hannibal’s lips were back at his neck. “Hannibal?” Hannibal hummed in answer against Will’s neck and Will did his best to ignore the way the vibrations made a chill race down his spine. “Were you serious?”

“About killing Miss Lounds?” he asked, free hand slipping under the unbuttoned collar of Will’s shirt and flattening out against Will’s chest to explore. Will shook his head, but his mouth wasn’t working anymore, so wrapped up in all that was Hannibal. His scent was assaulting, freshly washed and that aftershave made Will dizzy. Always so dizzy. “Then what are you referring to Will?”

“Does your head get foggy like mine does?” Will asked, the last train of thought he had completely lost and maybe never coming back, though he was certain it was important. Will sunk further into the couch at teeth on his ear, biting and lips sucking. “Fuck.”

“Language, Will,” Hannibal warned against Will’s ear. “Foggy, no. But my heart races. It’s unnerving.”

An unnatural sound ripped from Will’s throat and his hand was snatched up by Hannibal as he tried to cover his mouth unconsciously once more, a hot tongue pressed into his ear. Will’s body trembled, holding onto the pillow in a death grip at the new sensation that was so horribly pleasant that it sent a hot blush down his chest.

“Focus Will,” Hannibal instructed before biting the top of Will’s ear. “Push through the fog. What were you asking me?”

“No,” Will whimpered with a small shake of his head that was quickly stopped by a sharp tug in his hair. Will bit his lips between his teeth as a gentle kiss was placed to his temple.

“I will stop if you don’t answer me,” Hannibal cautioned, another kiss going to Will’s temple. “What were you asking me, darling boy?”

“Why do you call me boy?” Will swallowed, mouth dry.

“That’s not the question.” A kiss to his cheek. “Think Will.” A kiss to his jaw. Will struggled to pull himself mentally free, the swirling mist over his mind more than welcomed as was Hannibal’s hand back down his shirt. “What were you referring to?”

“Why do you call me boy?” Will repeated, hoping it would buy him some time to find his lost train.

“Your youth is entrancing.”

Will snorted. “You’re not that much older than me.”

“You still hold an innocence to you that is mesmerizing,” Hannibal explained, lips back at Will’s temple, kissing there gently, trying to give Will a chance at clarity. “What were you asking me Will?”

Will inhaled deeply and closed his eyes, letting himself sink into his mind for a moment to follow the train track through an icy mountain, pain in his head, the train out of sight. He had been pushed from it, shoved off the back by a woman. A woman that Will didn’t recognize. Will winced with a sharp inhale through his teeth as a ravenstag guided him down the train tracks through the night, body aching.

“You're safe, remarkable boy,” Hannibal’s voice assured from somewhere far off, a whisper through the wind. “Don’t let the memory distract you.”

“Were you serious about what you said about my son?”

There was a hum by Will’s ear and Will slowly pulled himself from Hannibal’s grip enough to turn on the couch and look up at the man, whose grip had come untangled from Will until Will was settled. Hannibal’s hands returned to Will, one brushing through curls that had dried in a mess from Hannibal’s grip and the other carefully tracing the new bruising around Will’s neck.

“Yes,” Hannibal settled on after a moment of silence. His eyes flickered up to Will as his hand closed around Will’s throat. The empath didn’t flinch at the grip, just allowed Hannibal to palm at his pulse that was racing.

“You’ll take us both to Europe?”

“I have a villa in Venice that’s right on the water. There’s a garden in the back with an olive tree. Several floors, a harpsichord, a balcony looking out at the ocean and our own dock. You can sail your boat.”

“And you really mean to include Walter in this life you’ve thought up?” Will asked, pulling his bottom lip into his teeth when the words left him. He knew Hannibal had pictured it strictly for the two of them. A mixture of what both of them loved. Something that would make both of them happy. Somewhere they could be themselves.

Hannibal sighed and released Will before moving around the couch to sit beside the boy, hand reaching out to take one of Will’s. “I figured you were packaged together from the moment you wouldn’t run away with me,” Hannibal answered, bringing Will’s hand to his mouth so he could kiss at his knuckles, lips dreamily hot. Teeth scraped against Will’s knuckle and Will looked away with a shiver, blush decorating his cheeks. “The boy will stay with us. I will take care of him.”

“He’s not your son,” Will pointed out, keeping his eyes tightly on the pillow in his hand. “You don’t have to-”

“I promise to take care of him. Of both of you.”

Will’s eyes slid shut at another nip at his knuckle, breathing out with another shiver. “You promise?” he asked, letting Hannibal’s hand cup his face and pull him forward. His breath was stolen from his lungs as lips pressed to his own.

“I promise,” Hannibal whispered when he broke the kiss to find dazed blue eyes looking up at him behind dark lashes. “Someplace safe where he can grow up, the best schooling we can find for him. He will want for nothing.”

“Hannibal...” Will trailed off, there clearly meant to be more to the sentence, but Hannibal didn’t push it. Will leaned forward and kissed Hannibal again, hands reaching out to push Hannibal back. Will carefully climbed over the top of Hannibal, straddling the man once he had leaned back into the couch, head propped up on the armrest. He kissed Hannibal again, fingers getting tangled in Hannibal’s tie as it undid the knot there. “You’re too perfect. You do so much more than you need to.”

“The answer is always yes for you Will. Forever yes.”

Will kissed Hannibal again, something soft but desperate as the cherry wine red silk was pulled free from Hannibal’s neck and left to tumble to the hardwood.

“I love you.”

"I love you, too."

Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

“Can I keep staring at you?”
“Can I touch you?”
“Can I kiss you?”

Losing You Terrifies Me

Morgan was odd, Walter had decided on. He wasn’t mean like the rich kids at his school were, but he wasn’t not mean either. He had a different way of going about insulting people. The insults were hidden well behind a smile and innocently said words. It made Walter hate him even more. Ok, maybe hate was a strong word. Maybe detest was better.

But Walter clung to the boy, using him as his only saving grace during the day. Morgan saved him from having to talk to Alana, who Walter was becoming more and more weary of the longer she hung around. He didn't mind Margot too much though. She was relatively quiet unless scolding Morgan, which was few and far between.

The horses were lovely. Walter had never seen a horse in person before and was shocked by how much bigger they were in life than they looked in movies. He liked one with a black coat named Apollo. All of the horses seemed to have the names of the Greek Gods, though Walter only knew a small portion of them. And he assumed they were Greek Gods. None of them were named after the planet, so... Greek and not Roman.

Margot had offered to take him riding, but Walter was hesitant until Alana said that they could continue their conversation from breakfast. Walter had never agreed to something he didn't want to do so quickly before. He let the woman who was much stronger than he thought she would be, hoist him up onto the horse and she climbed on behind him, arms going around him.

One on the reins, the other around his middle with a gentle warning not to hold onto the saddle because it would stiffen up his body and make him unbalanced. The horse rushed off into the cold morning air and Walter immediately wished he had a warmer coat than the thin flannel he had on, but he didn't care after a bit.

It felt good to be free for a moment. Away from everything and everyone, Margot not even really there in her silence. The wind blew his hair back and filled his lungs with an icy chill, but it made his chest feel more open, less constricted.

The grounds were pretty in their snowy painted background. Leafless tree branches clung to icicles as their new clothing and the snow gave a satisfying crunch under the horses hooves. All too soon it's over, the horse coming to a stop, but not back at the stables. They're near what looks like a pond that was partly frozen over, the edges melted away and showing the calm surface.

Margot climbed from the horse and helped Walter down who looked around curiously, stepping closer to the pond and to the frozen reeds, picking at one of them, the brown fibers crackling in his hand.

“It looked like you needed a moment to just think,” Margot said with a small smile in her voice. “We can stay out here as long as you need, Wally. I know Alana can sometimes be a bit overbearing.”

Walter looked back over his shoulder curiously as Margot led the horse to the edge of the water so it could drink. “You're not going to try to probe me like she did, are you?”

“Not unless you want to talk," Margot stated with pursed lips, petting the horse's long neck. “I will listen if you want to. But I understand the comfort with silence and pretending that the world doesn't exist for a moment or two.”

And so there was silence. A very nice and long and comfortable silence as Walter knelt down and pushed pieces of ice around in the pond with one of the stale reeds. The first time he had been able to fully think all morning, a quiet space needed. He held onto the words of others far too much to have his own thoughts sometimes. Not feelings. He didn't feel their feelings like his father had explained, but he held to their thoughts to the point where he sometimes wondered if he ever had any original thoughts of his own or if they were all manufactured from his surroundings.

“Is it wrong for me to be so accepting?” Walter asked into the stillness of the late morning air as he tossed the reed into the pond and rose back to his feet. Margot was quiet, waiting for the boy to continue, unsure if she was meant to answer or not, not that she would be opposed to answering, she knew some people preferred to work aloud than in their heads. “I wasn’t always accepting. I think I learned it when Will married my mom. Just this idea that this was how life was and there wasn’t a reason to let it affect me or hurt.”

“Radical Acceptance,” Margot supplied, having heard the term from Alana every now and then when she would come home from work stressed. “It’s a distress tolerance tool,” Margot further explained at a curious expression.

“Alana thinks I’m hiding, building walls. She doesn’t have to say it for me to know it’s true. Do you think I’m building walls?” Walter stepped closer to the horse and reached out a hesitant hand to pet the large creature on the nose.

“I’m not a doctor.”

Walter gave a small nod. “It’s refreshing at the moment.”

Margot smiled lightly. “Do you want to feed Alcander?” She opened a pack on the side of the saddle and pulled out a green apple, handing it over to Walter who took it. “Just hold it out in your palm.”

Walter did as instructed and smiled when the apple was pulled from his hand with large teeth and searching lips. The apple crunched in the horse’s mouth before he returned to digging through the snow in search of any grass that could be eaten.

“I don’t think you’re building walls,” Margot said hesitantly, as if she didn’t want to step on whatever Alana had already concluded was wrong with him. “I don’t think there is anything wrong with accepting what the world is offering you. But you also don’t have to take it. You can put up a fight. You don’t have to accept.”

“I don’t think my situation is one I can exactly fight,” Walter said with a small shrug. “I don’t even know if I want to. My dad will come back for me and then everything will be normal-ish again. As normal as it can be.”

“You’re taking this quite well,” Margot noted and Walter gave a nod, petting the horse once more. “And you're sure that you’re ok?”

Walter sighed, irritated. “I’m fine. Really.”

“I think we’re all just worried about you Wally,” Margot said sweetly. “Enough said though. Would you like to go back or stay here for another little while?”

“Can we stay for a bit longer?”

“Of course.”

“What are you reading?” Walter asked boredly. There was no TV in the house and he had ducked out of the ever watchful eyes of Alana, Margot letting him know where Morgan was. Doing homework in his room.

“The Great Gatsby,” Morgan replied, eyes not leaving his book. “I have a report due on it.”

“What about?”

“About the symbolism of the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg.”

Walter sat down on the desk and Morgan gave him a scornful look before he returned to the page he was on. “I have no idea what that means.” Walter kicked his legs as he looked around the boy’s room that looked similar to the one he had stayed in, though this one had built-in bookshelves around the bed that held hundreds of books. Ones that all looked well read, discoloration in the spines from having been cracked open.

“He’s meant to symbolize God looking down on the horrors of a city. There’s a murder that happens in front of the billboard. God sees all, I suppose. I don’t really find myself believing in a god. I suppose there could be some sort of unknown entity that made the universe, it makes sense, but to name it God would be-”

“No one cares,” Walter muttered, the words jumping from his mouth before he had a chance to stop them. He winced, but Morgan didn’t look up at him, just fell silent and continued in his story. “Sorry. Your mom is kinda stressing me out. I don’t like the prying.”

“She likes to dig her fingers into other people’s business, but she does it to be helpful, not to hurt,” Morgan defended quietly, a small bit of hurt in his voice. “She told me what happened. I’m sorry about your mom.”

“Me too,” Walter said softly with a small nod. “I still don’t think that I really understand that she’s gone yet. It’s like... she’s just gone shopping or something and she’ll be back soon. But don’t tell your mom. I’m really ok.”

“Where’s your dad?” Morgan closed the book and looked up at Walter who had found interest in the small Newton's cradle, the toy clacking loudly in the room as Walter let one of them go and the energy transferred through to the ball at the other end.

“I don’t know. He went away to stay safe.”

“He could have stayed here,” Morgan offered, watching Walter shrug in his flannel, curious what the fabric felt like. He reached out his hand, but stopped when Walter tensed, eyes sharp. He didn’t like to be touched, that was fine. Morgan didn’t necessarily like touch either. “It’s safe here too. Hanni was here for a while.”

“Hanni?” Walter asked curiously, though his body didn’t unshield itself, staying out of reach, but still seated on the desk. “Hannibal? He was here?”

“He stayed here while he was healing from an accident,” Morgan answered with a small nod. He looked over Walter for a moment before he climbed up onto his chair and sat on the desk beside Walter who stared at Morgan with a frown. Imitating was not a form of flattery. “He’s not like what they say about him.”

“No,” Walter agreed with a small nod. “He’s nothing like what they say.”

“He was very nice.”

“Very nice,” Walter once more agreed, voice small as he thought back over the night before. Hannibal had done nothing to hurt them, he had been the one to help his mom. Hannibal had been kind, he had just tied them up as a precaution to protect himself. He was never going to hurt them, his words were said to snap back at whatever his mom had said to him. It took Walter looking at the memories from the outside to really pick out what Hannibal had been doing. “Kind.”

“Hard to picture him as the monster they say he is.” Morgan’s legs began to follow Walter’s in their swing subconsciously and Walter quickly stilled his movements, looking over Morgan with another frown.

“I guess he can turn it on and off,” Walter muttered, eye sharp on the boy who was copying his movements.

“Your dad and Hanni like each other. Will would come over here a lot to see him.”

Walter asked, mouth suddenly very dry at the idea that while Walter was struggling to live without a father figure, Will had been off in a dreamy haze of love, if it was love. They had kissed. It had been nearly more shocking than his mother being shot. “Why?”

Morgan shrugged. “I think they really liked each other. Hanni was sad whenever Will would leave. He was happier when Will was here, easier for my moms to deal with when Will had visited. He wasn’t quite as bad of a guest. But if you couldn’t walk, I think you would get pretty frustrated too.”

“He was walking fine.”

“He had some procedure done on his knee. Was on crutches for a long time. He used to let me try them, but they were too big for me. He’s very tall.” The fact was said nearly in a question, as if Morgan had to think about it for a moment. “Did you dad love your mom?”

“What?” Walter asked as the air was sucked from the room. He had been doing well enough with dealing with Alana’s digging and Margot’s gentle nudges, but he hadn’t been ready for the child to push into him as well. And it was something that Walter couldn’t block out like he had been able to do all day. There was a sharp jab in his ribs and his hands clenched. “Shut up.” Walter hoped down from the desk with a scowl, hands fisted. “You have no right to-”

“I didn’t mean to upset you. I just thought that Hannibal was your dad until my mom told me-”

“Hannibal is not...” Walter trailed off. Hannibal was. Will wasn’t about to leave Hannibal. Walter knew that. Walter was more than well aware of how Hannibal had comforted Will in the car ride with more touches than what were normal. He was aware of the looks and the words, the pet names said in Lithuania to calm. And he had been brutally present for their kiss. Dr. Hannibal Lecter was as good as his father, and he just needed to accept that. That’s what everything boiled down to, didn’t it? “Shut up Morgan. You don’t know anything. Go play with your books or something.”

“You read books,” Morgan corrected with a slightly offended tone.

“No one cares.”

“Boys, time for dinner!” Alana’s voice called in the distance.

Walter frowned, but went for the door, tiny Morgan following after him with The Great Gatsby in hand.

* * *

Will woke from a sleep he couldn't remember entering and was greeted with the light sounds of Bach in the air and the scent of cooking. Will inhaled deeply of the smell he couldn't exactly place, and opened his eyes. He was curled up on the couch, a blanket had been draped over the top of him and a pillow placed beneath his head.

Will slowly sat up and stretched the sore muscles in his shoulders, catching the last rays of the sun before they disappeared for the long winter nights. Will rose from the couch, the blanket being pushed aside as he straightened his very wrinkled dress shirt.

His eyes rested on Hannibal who was busy in the kitchen. Will gave a fond smile and wandered his way over to the stove. He circled his arms around Hannibal's waist and hid his face into Hannibal's warm shoulders. He thought he could feel Hannibal flinch, but it wasn't nearly enough for Will to register it as anything serious.

"Did you sleep well?" Hannibal asked, as he continued sautéing what looked like garlic, onions and some shrimp that were beginning to turn a light pink.

"Yes," Will answered softly. "I'm sorry I fell asleep. I don't even remember letting myself."

"Your body needs rest. It went through a shock. Do not be sorry," Hannibal stated with a kind tone.

"It smells really good," Will complimented from where he hid himself into Hannibal's back. "What is it?"

"Shrimp and grits. I hope that pleases you."

Will gave a nod, inhaling deeply once more, arms tightening around Hannibal. Hannibal twisted awkwardly in Will's grip and Will pulled back swiftly, afraid that he had somehow hurt the man. Hannibal gave him a small smile over his shoulder. "Sorry," he muttered in a deeply apologetic tone. "I need to check something in the oven. Do you want to find something to drink tonight? There's some bottles in the pantry."

Will took a step back and slowly moved to the pantry that Hannibal indicated to while Hannibal opened up the over and reached into it with a dishcloth. Will gleaned over the options in the pantry before pulling a green bottle out. A 2015 Truchard Chardonnay.

Will stepped back into the kitchen where Hannibal had set out a dish of steaming cornbread, what looked like homemade honey butter as well as the shrimp and grits. He gave an approving smile and took the chardonnay from Will's hands with a gentle kiss before going to work in opening the bottle.

"Dishes are above the sink," Hannibal said in an open instruction. Will fetched two plates and found the silverware drawer returning to the counter to take a glass of white wine and Hannibal served them and Will found himself being guided with a hand to the small of his back to the dining table.

Dinner was wonderful, as it always was. There was always something so comforting when Hannibal made something specifically for Will. And Will was certain it was to make up for the night before when they didn't have a chance to eat, but he didn't care. It was warm and reminded Will of home. Hannibal was home.

Will inhaled deeply, eyes closed as he finished his last bite, content. So content to be right there in that dining room. So content to have Hannibal's eyes on him. So content to hear Hannibal's genuine curiosity with the veil of a smile over it.

"What's that look for?"

Will didn't open his eyes, simply inhaled deeply once more, letting the air fill his cold chest. "You're perfect."

There was a soft chuckle. "Far from," Hannibal assured.

"I just want to stay in this moment."

"Is it that blissful?" Hannibal asked. Will nodded in answer. "Would you like anymore to eat?" Will shook his head. "Can I keep staring at you?"

Will licked at his lips and could feel a heat rise to his cheeks, his palms sweating. He wiped his palms against his thighs and gave another small nod. Will could feel the heat from Hannibal's gaze as the man's eyes trailed down his body, Will too embarrassed by the intrusive question to open his eyes.

"Can I touch you?"

Will shivered at the words with a nod and he could feel a warm hand caress down his arm, the fabric in the way of skin on skin, but Will supposed it was better that he was able to contain himself, though being had on this table was starting to sound wonderful.

There was a sharp heat beside Will and he sighed as a nose nudged at his ear.

"Can I kiss you?"

"Yes," Will said breathlessly, the air that wasn't in his lungs somehow stolen from him with unexpectedly warm lips. So warm that when the kiss ended, Will's eyes opened with concern creasing his brows. "Hannibal?" Will asked, hands reaching up to take Hannibal's face, but Hannibal moved before Will had the chance. Hannibal took both plates from the table and to the sink, setting them down before returning to the table to pick up his wine glass and taking a small sip. Will looked over Hannibal's face carefully. It was pale, with a green hue to it, though his cheeks were flushed pink, a sheen of sweat over his skin. "Hannibal, are you alright?"

Will got to his feet and reached out a hand to Hannibal, who took another calculated step back and out of Will's reach. Will sighed in annoyance and took a step forward, taking Hannibal's wrist in his. He took the wine glass from Hannibal's fingers and placed it back on the table before dragging the killer closer to him.

"You look sick," Will whispered, one hand holding Hannibal in place while the other reached out. "Are you feeling alright?"

"Fine," Hannibal answered, making Will frown.

“Don’t lie to me.” Will placed the back of his fingers to Hannibal’s cheek where a burning heat was across Hannibal’s skin. Will’s hand moved to Hannibal’s forehead and he frowned. Then dropped to his neck, the back of his fingers only finding more inescapable heat there as well. “You have a fever. Why didn’t you say anything earlier?”

“I’m fine Will,” Hannibal assured, pulling himself from Will’s grip.

He returned to the sink and Will frowned as Hannibal turned on the water to do dishes. Will moved over when both of Hannibal’s hands took the edge of the sink and Will watched in slow motion as Hannibal’s knees gave way under him. Will raced forward and caught Hannibal’s body before Hannibal could hit the floor.

“Hey,” Will scolded, arm tight around Hannibal’s waist as he helped Hannibal gain his balance again. Will turned off the sink and sighed. “Let’s get you into bed. I’ll clean up dinner.” Will nodded towards the hall and with an arm over his shoulder and his own arm tightly around Hannibal’s waist, Will helped take Hannibal back and into their room. He rested Hannibal down on the bed, sitting down on the edge, fingers brushing damp hair from Hannibal’s face. “Let’s get you cleaned up. You need sleep.”

Will got to his feet and went to the bathroom, wetting down a cloth with cool water before returning to the bed where Hannibal was attempting to sit up. Will rushed over and took Hannibal’s shoulder, forcing him back down into the mattress.

“No, you don’t,” Will said forcefully. “Let me take care of you, Hannibal. We’ll get you some medicine and you’ll sleep and be good as new in the morning.”

Will placed the wet cloth to Hannibal’s forehead, gently patting down the man’s fevered skin, cleaning the sweat that was there. Hannibal shivered as the washcloth pressed into his neck, chills racking his body.

Will slowly unbuttoned Hannibal’s shirt, pulling it open to dab the wet cloth over his skin there as well. Will’s hands paused as he came to a bandage near Hannibal’s left rib cage. Around the bandaging the skin was hot and spotted with angry red.

“Hannibal, what happened?” Will asked softly, pulling the shirt fully open to look at the marking that was there.

“Jack,” Hannibal got out weakly, breathing short. Why hadn’t Will noticed earlier? Was he that dense? Just wanted so badly to be in his own head instead of everyone else’s? Was Hannibal asking for help earlier when he asked what Will felt about him? “He got me with the knife when I wrestled the gun from his hand.”

“You didn’t clean it properly, did you?” Will demanded, voice harsher than he meant it, but there was a sickly feeling creeping up through his chest that made his tense, on edge. “It’s infected.”

“Sepsis, if I had to guess,” Hannibal answered, licking at his lips.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Will’s hands worked carefully, though his fingers were stiff. He pulled back the bandage and looked over the mark that was there. The gauze was red with blood and yellow with another liquid. “Damn it, Hannibal. What do I do?”

“Wash and rebandage it. There’s antiseptic and bandages under the sink.”

Will jumped to his feet, heading back into the bathroom and tossing the rag on the sink. He ripped open the cabinets and pulled out the items that Hannibal had indicated. Will carefully cleaned at the wound, watching Hannibal's hands fist weakly into the bedspread under him. Once cleaned and bandaged again, Will fetched sleepwear for Hannibal and helped the man into the bed.

"What else do you need?" Will asked, hands frantically running over Hannibal's face. This wasn't done. Not in a long shot. Blood poisoning wasn't something that just went away. "There has to be some medication or something." Hannibal's eyes stayed shut and his breathing was so faint Will began to shake. "Asshole, stay with me for a moment longer." Hannibal's eyes flickered open at the insult, though half lidded. "Tell me what you need. I-I don't know what to do to help you."

"Antibiotics," Hannibal replied. "Rocephin, Merrem, Fortaz, Claforan." Will blinked at the weird names and did his best to add them to memory. "Things like that."

"Things like that?" Will bit out bitterly. "What else Hannibal? I don't even know where to find these things. Are they over the counter or am I going to have to-"

"Any vet or shelter should have most of them."

The words made Will clench his hands so tightly that his nails cut into his palms. "Damn it, Hannibal." Will got to his feet, hands in his hair. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"You'd-" there was a choked breath, "-worry..."

Will's eyes looked over Hannibal, wanting to be soft, but he was so fucking pissed. They had narrowly escaped being taken in by Jack and Jack still had his grip in them. Hannibal had let Jack tag along with them.

"Of course I'd worry Hannibal!" Will shouted, knowing this wasn't the time but unable to stop the anger from jumping at the man in bed who seemed to be deteriorating more and more by the second. "After everything we've gone through, after everything- Fuck me." Will ran his hands over his face. "If I get these medicines, what are the doses?"

"Each of them every four hours."

"They can all be taken together?" Will asked. There wasn't an answer and Will felt his heart sink. He had to pass out now? "Fuck me."

Will knew better than to mix medications. He had done it once in a desperate attempt to calm a migraine and a head cold and had ended up with a bad mix of Dayquil and Tylenol that threw him for a three day spiral and did wonders on his liver, he was sure.

First he had to get the medication before he started dabbling in alchemy. He leaned over and checked Hannibal's breathing with the back of his hand and gave a sigh. "I'll be back soon," he assured, though he didn't know if Hannibal heard him. He leaned over and placed a kiss to Hannibal's fevered forehead and left the room.

He went to the kitchen and looked around until he found a single set of keys on the counter and then Hannibal's now emptied backpack in the closet and then raced out of the house and to the truck that they had driven here. Will glanced at his surroundings, taking in the small suburb that they were in. Something nice and not too expensive, but he didn't have time to think much about it now.

No, right now he was more worried over trying to find somewhere to get the medication, whose names were quickly fading from Will's mind the more he tried to hold onto them. He knew he was in Vermont. That was a start, but that was all Will knew. He had never been to Vermont. He didn't know what city they were in or where town was or if there would even be a pet clinic around here. He had no means to the internet or a phone and it was far too late for him to ask someone and he wasn't going to go knock on some neighbor's door to find out.

Will climbed into the truck and sighed. Hannibal had gotten him into this situation and it was such shit. Will wasn't sure he had ever been so incredibly angry with Hannibal before. Not even when Hannibal had tried to kill him or framed him for murders, not when he was drugged and used and experimented on. None of that was as bad as this and maybe that was backwards, but to Will it was true.

Will put the truck in drive and left the cul de sac, the speed limit meaning nothing to him in the winding streets he had to find his way out of. Will found the main road and gave a breath of relief, hoping he would be able to find his way back home again.

There was a line of shops that Will eventually found, searching each one carefully until he found the one he wanted. A small pet shelter at the end of the road. Will parked the car under a dead streetlamp and jumped from the truck, the backpack over his shoulder, looking around the building until he found a window in the back. Will's eyes danced over the glass that had puppies drawn on it in that glass chalk. Will inhaled deeply of the cold night air, pulled his jacket on to protect his arms and rammed his elbow into the glass. The glass shattered and rained down into the parking lot and Will shook the glass from his hair, ignoring the sharp pain and heat in his elbow. He was more concerned over whether there would be an alarm or not.

When nothing went off, Will climbed in through the window and looked around at the back room for a moment before racing to cabinets and throwing them open hoping he would remember what the antibiotics were called that Hannibal had told him, praying that he knew what they would be spelled like.

And he found them, eventually. He found all of them, but they were all liquid. Will shoved as many of each as he could into the backpack and then dug through more cabinets under the counters until he found several brown boxes. He pulled one to him and used his keys to dig into the packing tape, ripping open the box to find single use syringes in their own self packaging.

He probably didn't need two boxes, but he wasn't about to fuck around. With the backpack stuffed to the point of the zippers threatening to break and two boxes under his arms, Will climbed back out of the window and went back to the truck. Now he just had to find his way back home.

It took a moment or two for Will to find the right cul de sac, but the moment he found the house, he threw the truck back in park ignoring the angry grinding of gears. He jumped from the truck and raced back into the house, locking the door behind him before rushing back into the bedroom.

Will set everything on the bed and quickly moved over to Hannibal who hadn't moved an inch, brow furrowed in discomfort, breathing shallow and low. Will shook Hannibal gently and those muggy red eyes blinked open.

"Will," Hannibal whispered, mouth dry. "Water."

Will nodded and ran back to the kitchen, getting a glass of ice water not caring if some of it spilt on the hardwood as he raced back. He went back to the bed and set the glass on the side table before carefully helping Hannibal sit up. Hannibal leaned back against the headboard, eyes closed as he shivered.

“Hannibal,” Will called softly, sitting on the side of the bed and grabbing the cup of water. He placed the cup to Hannibal’s lips, but when he tilted the glass, water spilt down Hannibal’s chin. Will held to Hannibal’s chin to try to keep his head steady, but ended up with the same result. Will wasn’t sure what else to do and he was very nearly certain that Hannibal would not have invested in anything of the likes of bendy straws or sippy cups.

Will placed the cup to his lips, pulling the chilled water into his mouth before leaning over and placing his mouth to Hannibal’s. He was pleading silently with Hannibal to be conscious enough to process what Will was doing and maybe God did exist because Hannibal opened his mouth and drank slowly from Will’s lips. Will sighed into the kiss in relief, a hand brushing back Hannibal’s damp hair.

“More?” he asked softly when he pulled back. Hannibal licked at his lips with a small nod and Will quickly repeated the action until Hannibal seemed satisfied. “I got what you asked for,” Will explained, setting the cup aside and grabbing for the backpack. “I-I don’t know what to do with them though.” Will ripped open the backpack and dumped the contents out onto the bed, picking up one of the many boxes and pulling it open, dumping the contents into his hand. “I have to mix them?”

“There’s instructions on the box,” Hannibal explained. “Did you-did you-”

“Shh,” Will interrupted, a hand gently caressing Hannibal’s flushed cheek. “I’ve got more than enough sterile needles. It’s been a while since I’ve done drugs though, so I hope I’m ok with finding your veins.”

“Drugs?”

Even when Hannibal was high with a fever and being betted against by death himself, he was still curious. Still wanting to know everything there was to know, even if his mind wouldn’t remember.

“I thought it would stop all of the people that like to live in my head,” Will explained as he picked up the box and read over the instructions on it. “It worked for a bit, but then I had to use stronger things. A detective picked me out of the gutter and cleaned me up. Went to the police academy when I was clean.” Will placed the box aside and inhaled deeply, getting to work on mixing the medication. “I can administer all of these at the same time?” Will looked up at a weak nod. “Every four hours?”

“Yes,” Hannibal whispered, body still shaking with chills, his hands pulling blindly at the blankets around his middle. Will reached out and helped cover Hannibal in the blanket that was damp with sweat. He would need to find another one, maybe change the sheets too. “What was your vice?”

“Heroin,” Will replied, reaching for the box and pulling out a package. “I tried cocaine once, but it just made everything worse. I was too mentally alert, hypersensitive to sight, sound, and touch. It was a bad combination.”

Will opened the syringe package and pulled the stopper from the needle, dipping it into the mixed drug, filling the syringe to the right dosage. He placed the bottle aside and took Hannibal’s arm in his hand. Hannibal watched him carefully and Will was curious if he actually understood what was going on or if he was just on some autopilot setting.

Will flicked at the vein in his forearm until he could see it and then pressed the needle into Hannibal's skin. Hannibal didn't acknowledge the intrusion at all, just kept his barely opened eyes on Will. With that syringe empty, Will placed it back in its bag and placed it on the bedside table, reaching for the next box of medication and a new needle.

With everything administered, Will set an alarm on his phone for two and gathered up all of the used items to throw them away. "Let's get you into something more comfortable before you fall back to sleep," Will said, frowning at the shake of Hannibal's head. "You don't have a fucking say in this, Hannibal. Not right now," Will hissed as he wet the washcloth once more. He tossed it onto the bedside table and went to the dresser, searching until he found sleep pants and a light cotton t-shirt. Will set them on the edge of the bed and quickly cleaned up the mess, moving everything into the bathroom and setting them on the counter, keeping the bathroom light on and the door ajar to be able to see.

He changed Hannibal carefully into the sleep pants and pulled off the sweat damp dress shirt. "Would you like any more water?" Will asked as he reached for the wet cloth. Hannibal shook his head and winced as the cold was placed against his forehead, gently patting away the sweat across his skin. Will bit his lip, trying to hold back the words that were swirling around in his head. He didn't need to say them, it would just make everything worse, but the dam broke. "Do you have any idea how much I fucking hate you right now?"

Hannibal shook his head, but he didn't seem bothered by the words, he seemed more focused as the cloth found its way to his neck.

"I am so pissed off at you," Will continued, his words harsh, but his actions gentle as he continued to clean Hannibal's skin of sweat and salt. "I can't believe you would keep something like this from me, let something get this bad and still not fucking tell me. Are you shitting me?!" The sentence got away from him, loud in the quiet room, making Hannibal wince. "If you live through this, if-if-" Will clenched his teeth and scoffed, tossing the rag aside and grabbing the t-shirt, pulling Hannibal forward with a firm hand on Hannibal's shoulder. He pulled the shirt over Hannibal's head and through his teeth continued. "If you ever lie to me ever again, I will kill you myself. I'm not kidding Hannibal. If you hide something or lie to me, you will join your displays. I will hang you from a tree and decorate your insides with thirty pieces of silver after I spill your guts. And then I will meet you in the lowest levels of hell and watch as the devil himself chews on your body for eternity."

"Beautiful."

The word made Will's hands still and he blinked a few times, face relaxing, before sighing. "Of course you would think that beautiful," Will grumbled, feeling like his threat no longer held any weight. He helped Hannibal lay back down and pulled the blankets up and over him. "Get some sleep," Will instructed. "I'll be back for your next dose. Please don't..." Will trailed off, biting his bottom lip. "Please don't die between now and then, Hannibal. Please wake up when I come back. Because I really, I do..." Will trailed off, feeling his jaw tremble and he swallowed hard, biting back the tears. "I love you, Hannibal."

Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

He kissed every inch of Hannibal, every piece of skin that the urges pushed Will to. Calloused fingers from drawing, scars at his forearms from Will's own sins, the strength of muscles in his biceps. The small bit of chest that was uncovered by the collar of the t-shirt, a chest that held a still beating heart. A neck with a still steady pulse, though it was weak. A jawline that needed a shave, sharp cheekbones, the sunken purple under his eyes, his forehead and then his lips.

Will let himself rest back against Hannibal's chest, an ear over the man's heart to listen to it beating. He let his fingertips trace over Hannibal's chest and collar, resting against his neck to keep his pulse under his fingertips.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys. Sorry this chapter is coming out this late at night. I just got my first Covid shot yesterday and had to work a full shift today at work and I'm a bit out of it. Pretty tired and sore and on very much many tyloels. Hope you guys enjoy this chapter. Please let me know if you did! Love ya!

LOSING YOU TERRIFIES ME

The alarm went off on Will’s phone and he jumped at the sudden sound that filled the quiet house. He had been pacing the bedroom for hours, unable to keep still even if his eyes were burning and begging for sleep. Hannibal's condition had deteriorated during the night, and Will watched numbly as Hannibal continued to sweat and shiver, praying to every deity he could name.

Will turned off the alarm that Hannibal had slept through and sighed, rubbing at his eyes. He went to the bathroom and picked up everything he was going to need to tend to Hannibal and returned to the bedroom, setting it all on the bedside table. He sat down and gently shook Hannibal's shoulder before he went to work, mixing things and using the rest of other bottles. He got the first syringe filled and glanced back down at Hannibal as he muttered something in his fevered sleep, face once more covered in a sweat sheen.

Will couldn't exactly make out what Hannibal said, it was far too soft. Will reached out and took Hannibal's shoulder again.

"Wake up," Will said in a soft voice that felt too loud for the room.

"Mischa."

Will's eyes flickered over Hannibal's face, that was scrunched up with whatever delirium his mind was sending him through. His sister's name fell from his lips several more times, and Will frowned, a sense of jealousness filling his body. Not because it was her name he was saying and not his own, but because if he was calling out to her, then Will was losing him. And she did not get to take him.

"Hannibal," Will said, stronger now. "Wake up."

Hannibal didn't budge, just continued to speak incoherently. Will inhaled deeply, a burning in his tired eyes at tears. He took Hannibal's arm and began his doses. At least Hannibal didn't have to be awake to take his medicine.

"I hate you," Will hissed through his teeth as he grabbed another needle and ripped the package open with his teeth. "I fucking hate you and you better not fucking leave me. Not now. Not like this." Will got the next dose ready and pushed the needle into Hannibal's skin. Will let a sob leave his mouth and his head fell forward as the tears poured down his cheeks. "Mischa, you better not take him. You better let him go. He's not done here. I need him. Do you hear me, Mischa? He's mine, not yours. You can have him after he's older and greyer and wrinkled and can't walk. Until then, you keep your hands off of him."

Will wiped at the hot tears on his cheeks and reached for the next bottle and needle. Once finished, Will threw everything away and set the next alarm, before he sat on the edge of the bed again, using the wet cloth to dab at Hannibal's skin again. Hannibal shivered and his face screwed up at the cold, but Will didn't care. He cleaned Hannibal down and found himself back at Hannibal's side, leaning his head onto Hannibal's chest, listening to Hannibal's heart and feeling the rise and fall of his chest.

"Mischa." Hannibal's body tremored through a violent shiver and Will closed his eyes tightly as more tears lined them, a lump in his throat. "Mischa." And a slew of Lithuanian that Will couldn't follow.

"You don't get to fucking go to her, Hannibal," Will choked out, hands clutching at the fabric of Hannibal's shirt. "You're mine. No one else can have you." Will sat up and leaned over, kissing Hannibal's forehead, skin salty and hot. "You tell her to wait for you, damn it. You do not get to leave if I have a say in it." He placed a kiss to Hannibal's lips, a sob tearing from his throat. "Please, wake up Hannibal. Please."

Tears fell to Hannibal’s flushed skin as Will continued to lean over him, foreheads together. Hannibal didn’t stir. Nothing other than his breathing was a sign to Will that he was still alive, but it did nothing to comfort the panic in Will’s chest.

Will pushed himself up and looked over Hannibal through blurry eyes. His skin was soaked in a sheen of sweat once more, the shivers still ever present. Will went back to the bathroom and wet the cloth again before returning to the bedside and once more completing the ritual of cleaning Hannibal’s skin.

He soothed the washcloth over Hannibal’s face and neck, the man jolting awake at the cold. His eyes snapped open, hazed and uncomprehending as they flickered over Will. Hannibal didn’t seem lucid, but the relief that washed over Will was enough that he pressed a kiss to Hannibal’s mouth anyway.

“Hannibal, can you drink some water for me, please?” Will asked swiftly, a hand brushing through Hannibal’s sweat damp hair. “Try for me, please.”

He snatched up the glass of water on the bedside table and moved to help support Hannibal’s head, tipping the glass against Hannibal’s lips. Hannibal’s eyes rolled back and Will supported his head as he slowly swallowed several mouthfuls of water. Will placed the cup back down and by the time Hannibal was placed against the pillow, he was asleep again.

Will’s chest clenched back up as exhaustion washed over him, making him cry once more. He wasn’t sure what else to do. He wasn’t sure what else Hannibal needed. He wasn’t a fucking doctor for crying out loud. Maybe he should take Hannibal to the doctors. They would be able to do much more than Will could. They could save this man. But what kind of life would Will be chaining Hannibal to if anyone recognized him? And they would be recognized. Chilton’s book made sure that everyone knew his face.

“Tell me what to do,” Will pleaded, even though he knew that Hannibal couldn’t hear him. “I need you... Hannibal... Please tell me what else I need to do.” He shakily reached for the cloth and once more began to dab it to Hannibal’s skin. He had to bring down this fever. He had to do something. Anything to keep himself busy. Anything to help this man. “I don’t know how else to help you, Hannibal. Please stay with me.”

Will repeated the actions, rewetting the cloth and cleaning Hannibal’s skin the moment that it dried. And soon, the violent shivers came to a stop and Hannibal was sleeping soundly, breath normal and no more mentions of his sister’s name.

Will slumped forward in exhaustion, fatigue pulling at his bones, making him feel weighed down like he was an anchor for a boat, keeping Hannibal in one place and faithfully afloat.

He watched Hannibal breathe for hours, the rise and fall of his chest in the bathroom light. His stomach growled and he winced at the sound in the room. With newfound anxiety, Will left the bedside and went back out into the main room that was still messy from dinner. Will swiftly cleaned everything, eating leftovers as he went, trying to get the edge of hunger to leave.

He almost nearly poured himself a glass of whiskey to calm his nerves, but decided it against it, needing to be perfectly aware for Hannibal’s sake. Will finished cleaning and raced back to the bedroom, anxiety creeping through his system the entire time.

Hannibal was still breathing when he returned and Will let out a sigh, glancing at his phone to check the time. He still has two hours before Hannibal's next dose.

Will moved back to the beside, sitting next to Hannibal's hip, watching Hannibal's chest rise and fall again. Will didn't want to sleep and he didn't, but his depleted body sent him forward and he rested his head back against Hannibal's chest, a palm pressed into Hannibal's heart to feel it beat. Will hoped that if he fell asleep that a lack in beating would wake Will up to help.

Would Will notice if Hannibal's heart stopped beating? Would he notice Hannibal's chest not raising his head anymore? He hoped that there would be some force in the universe that would allow him to. There would. He would feel Hannibal slip away. Even if they were worlds apart, Will would know.

The alarm went off sooner than Will thought it would and he jumped upright, fishing his phone from his pocket, turning off the alarm and setting another one before inhaling deeply and rubbing at his eyes. He hovered a hand over Hannibal's nose and could feel the fevered breath against his skin, the knot in his stomach easing slightly.

Will went to the bathroom and fetched the medicine before returning to his spot at Hannibal's hip. His eyes wandered over Hannibal's body that was once more covered in a layer of sweat and despite how tired Will was, he resolved to clean Hannibal again once his medicine was taken.

"Hannibal," Will whispered, a hand gently caressing Hannibal's face. "Please wake up." Hannibal's eyes opened groggily and he swallowed dryly. Will gave a small smile and ran his fingers through Hannibal's hair. "Thank god," he breathed out, something broken in his voice. "Can you drink some water for me?" Will helped Hannibal sit up and grabbed the nearly empty glass from the bedside table, pressing it to Hannibal's lips. He tipped it back and Hannibal slowly drank until he turned his head away from Will and Will rested Hannibal back down. "I'm going to give you your medicine now. Can you stay awake for me?"

Will set to work, eyes continuously flickering up to Hannibal's face to see distant eyes watching him carefully. He could see the want of sleep over Hannibal's features, but he was grateful the man was trying to stay awake for him. Even if just for a moment. It gave Will some strength back. They weren't out of the woods yet, but they were making progress. This was a step in the right direction.

Will finished the medicine and looked over Hannibal's arm. He would need to move over to the other arm for the next round. He couldn't keep abusing this one. Will knew better than to rely on one arm completely. And there were other veins he could use if he needed to. He almost wished that he could have found an IV drip so that he only had to stick Hannibal once, but the man could live being pricked. After a while, he wouldn't notice the pain of the needle anymore. Will had stopped noticing anyways.

Will threw everything away and grabbed a new rag from the bathroom, wetting it down and going back for the bed. He took his time wiping down Hannibal's skin, kissing the dampness with every swipe of the rag.

He could see Hannibal's dislike as the cold was pressed into his neck, but Will didn't care that Hannibal didn't like the cold, he was more happy that Hannibal was still hovering on the edge of consciousness.

Will's lips continued to follow the rag, down Hannibal's arm until Will pulled Hannibal's hand to him, kissing at each of the man's knuckles and then into Hannibal's palm. Hannibal's shivers were letting up once more, but he still didn't seem lucid and that quickly pushed the happiness from Will and sent worry through him and to the bottom of his stomach that maybe he shouldn't have filled with food.

Will needed to sleep, but the thought was honestly revolting. It was six in the morning and he hadn't closed his eyes once. He was going to make himself sick if he didn't take care of himself and then where would they be? He couldn't care for Hannibal if he was ill.

And how could he sleep when every touch of Hannibal's skin, ever kiss placed to the man could be Will's last? And so he kept touching, kept memorizing every part of Hannibal he could as a just in case. A just in case that made Will want to throw up. Just in case Hannibal did leave. Just in case Mischa was not the kind little girl Will had pictured her to be. Just in case...

He kissed every inch of Hannibal, every piece of skin that the urges pushed Will to. Calloused fingers from drawing, scars at his forearms from Will's own sins, the strength of muscles in his biceps. The small bit of chest that was uncovered by the collar of the t-shirt, a chest that held a still beating heart. A neck with a still steady pulse, though it was weak. A jawline that needed a shave, sharp cheekbones, the sunken purple under his eyes, his forehead and then his lips.

Will let himself rest back against Hannibal's chest, an ear over the man's heart to listen to it beating. He let his fingertips trace over Hannibal's chest and collar, resting against his neck to keep his pulse under his fingertips.

He wasn't quite sure what he would do if Hannibal died. He knew it wouldn't be fair on Walter or Alana and Margot, but Will was positive that he could lie here and let himself die with Hannibal. And it was wrong and unhealthy and so fucked up, but he couldn't imagine a world without this man in it. Even when Hannibal had been behind a glass wall, he had been alive. He was still pulling strings in the world, but if he died the string that was connecting him to Hannibal would be severed and Will was very certain that he would be lost. He was far too tangled up, far too trapped in the spider's web to make it out of this alive even if the spider was dead.

His eyes met Hannibal's, the amber dull. Will gave a faint smile and his fingers caressed over Hannibal's neck.

"Go back to sleep Hannibal," Will instructed softly. "Please rest." Will tilted his head and placed a kiss against Hannibal's heart. "I'll be here when you wake. I promise."

Will watched as Hannibal's eyes slid shut and his breathing immediately relaxed into something much slower. Will's finger's continued to rub circled into Hannibal's neck. He tried to push sleep off as long as he could, but the gentle rise and fall of Hannibal's chest and the rhythm of his heart lull Will to much needed sleep.

"Will?"

The word yanked Will from his rest and he blinked his eyes open, before slowly sitting up, cheek damp from Hannibal's sweat. The room was brighter now, the sun up and pouring through the curtains in the windows. Will checked his phone. It was only 7:32. He must have fallen asleep without realizing, but the hour and a half did nothing to ease the grogginess in his muscles. His eyes met Hannibal's, red open, but tired.

Will snapped sober abruptly, his heart pounding against his rib cage. Tears pricked at the corners of his eyes and a lump formed in his throat. The relief was nearly painful as it flooded his body. He leaned over and placed kisses to Hannibal's face, every inch he could reach before he captured up Hannibal's lips, tears falling down his cheeks.

"Hannibal," he sobbed out, the name nearly a strangled cry from Will's throat.

There was a weak touch to Will's cheek, a finger or two wiping at the trail of tears against his skin. "It's ok, Will," Hannibal assured in a feeble voice. "Everything's alright."

Will cried as he hid his head into Hannibal's neck, placing kisses to the heated skin there. Will's arms circled around Hannibal as best they could.

"I thought you were going to die," Will whispered, unable to hold back the whimper in his words.

"I feel like I did," Hannibal rasped out, voice rough from disuse. "You kept me alive."

Will sat up, fingers tracing over Hannibal's cheeks and jaw. "I might be a little possessive," Will muttered, causing Hannibal to chuckle slightly before it turned into a cough. The act was enough to make Will feel a little lighter, a little better. "Is the worst over now? I don't know if-if I can..." Will trailed off, biting his bottom lip to keep from crying again.

"My fever's mostly broken. Just keep giving me the antibiotics and I should be fine," Hannibal explained, a weak arm reaching out for fingers to brush knotted curls behind Will's ear. "I should probably eat and drink something though."

"Alright," Will said, a little faster than he needed to. "What-What would you like?"

"Soup would probably be the best thing," Hannibal answered. "Canned is fine."

Will gave a small laugh. "Are you sure you didn't die? Who are you?"

Hannibal gave a dim smile. "You look like you just fought a war. I don't want to burden you anymore than I already have."

"I'll be right back," Will assured, placing a kiss on Hannibal's lips, lingering there a little longer than necessary.

He left the bedroom and wandered through the kitchen, digging through the pantry and dumping a can of chicken noodle soup into a bowl before throwing it into the microwave. The minute and a half nearly made Will go mad, the timer seeming to go slower the more Will stared at it, so he made himself busy with getting a glass of ice water for Hannibal to replace the empty glass that was in the bedroom. With soup and water in hand, Will made his way back to the bedroom, setting everything down on the bedside table before taking a seat.

He helped Hannibal sit up against the headboard and took the soup into his hands, blowing on a spoonful of it, before holding it out to Hannibal. Hannibal chuckled, eyes closing tiredly.

"I can feed myself Will," he muttered.

"I'd rather do it," Will admitted softly. "Please eat."

Hannibal gave a tiny nod before opening his eyes and letting Will give him the spoonful of soup. After a few more bites, Hannibal stopped Will with a shake of his head. "No more, please," he whispered. “Water?” Will exchanged the bowl for the glass and placed it to Hannibal’s lips who gulped the water down greedily with a groan.

“Careful,” Will warned, hand brushing back Hannibal’s silver hair. “I don’t want you getting sick.” Will placed the cup aside after it was nearly empty and looked over Hannibal for a moment. “Do you need to use the bathroom before you go back to sleep? We have two more hours before your next round of medicine.”

Hannibal nodded and Will helped him from the bed and to the bathroom door, Hannibal stopping with a hand to the door frame. “I can do this Will.”

“Alright,” Will whispered, letting the door close between them. It took everything in him to not let the distance bother him and he put himself to work changing the bedding that was damp with sweat. It took him sometime to find the linen closet, but once found, the bed was put back together. He could hear the water running in the bathroom as he fluffed the pillows with new pillow cases on them. The door opened and Will glanced up to see a fond look on Hannibal’s face. “You doing alright?’ Will asked worriedly and Hannibal gave a nod.

“Can I change?”

Will gave a nod and immediately went to the dresser to find Hannibal new clothes. Will helped Hannibal change in silence and then helped Hannibal back into bed, pulling the blankets over Hannibal.

“Do you need anything else?” Will asked, fighting back a yawn. His hand covered his mouth and when he opened his eyes again, he was met with a concerned look from Hannibal. “What?”

“Have you slept?”

“A bit,” Will replied and at an incredulous look from Hannibal, Will sighed. “About an hour.”

“Come here, my love.”

Will closed his eyes and covered his mouth with his hand, an arm wrapping around his middle as a new wave of tears washed over him. He leaned over, feeling like his chest would cave in if he didn’t hold onto himself. He didn’t think the term of endearment would mean that much to him, never thought that it would bring him to tears and he realized just how badly he would have missed the kind words Hannibal used to call Will his.

“You’ve over exerted yourself, Will. Come here, please,” Hannibal instructed, distress in his voice. Will forced himself forward and collapsed onto the bed beside Hannibal, curling into Hannibal’s side, head back on the man’s chest so he could hear Hannibal’s heartbeat. Arms wrapped around him and Will let himself be dragged into their warmth. “You were awake all night?”

“I-I didn’t want to lose you,” Will explained through heavy breaths that boarded on hyperventilating. Fingers tangled into his head, grounding him with their surprising strength. “I didn’t want you to stop brea-to stop breathing.”

“Will, look at me,” Hannibal ordered gently, tugging lightly at Will’s hair. Will looked up and moved to be a little closer to Hannibal’s face and Hannibal pulled him into a kiss. “I didn’t mean to scare you, beautiful boy.”

“Again,” Will whispered, voice choked. “Don’t stop calling me those names. God, please don’t stop telling me how much you love me. I couldn’t bear going a day without hearing them.”

Hannibal tipped his head to the side, kissing Will’s forehead. “I love you, *brangiausias berniukas.*” Will whimpered as he rested back against Hannibal’s chest, being greedy, letting Hannibal care for him when Will should have been letting Hannibal rest. “*Tu toks ypatingas man, rūpestingas berniukas.*”

“You spoke Lithuanian when you were asleep,” Will muttered, shifting enough to get under the blankets with Hannibal, taking in Hannibal’s warmth as he settled back against Hannibal. “You kept calling your sister’s name.” Hannibal was silent and Will glanced up to see a thoughtful expression on Hannibal.

“Anything in English?”

Will shook his head. “No. Her name was all I understood. I thought she was...” Will trailed off, dismissing the idea by hiding his face in Hannibal’s chest. “Never mind.”

“You thought she was going to take me,” Hannibal finished for him. Will gave a nod, but didn’t say anything. “I don’t think she would have done that. I think she would be happy that I have you,” Hannibal mused, fingers working deeper into Will’s hair. “You remind me of her in some ways.”

“I do?” Will asked curiously, looking back up at a very tired expression, with half lidded eyes.

Hannibal hummed, head resting back against the headboard, the arm around Will’s waist tightening, fingers slowing in their wandering of Will’s curls. “Very empathetic, very unlike me in every way. I was a better person around her, the darkness in me not so uncontrolled. She kept me in check and it makes me curious who I would be if she were still alive.”

“I’m sorry,” Will whispered and received a shake of a head in answer.

“I found you in the end. You’re all I could ever ask for, Will. I’m afraid I wouldn’t have you if she stayed. We wouldn’t have found ourselves in each other’s lives, or at least not like this and this... is what I want,” Hannibal said, voice going softer while he spoke as sleep pulled at him once more. Will sat up, calling Hannibal’s eyes to open and look over at him.

“Lay down,” Will instructed softly. Hannibal did as he was told in slow movements and Will rested back down beside him, placing a kiss to Hannibal’s lips. “You have no idea how relieved I am you’re alright, Hannibal.”

“I seem to recall that you hate me,” Hannibal teased, breathing slowing to a more relaxed stage.

“With every inch of my being,” Will replied with a choked laugh as he kissed Hannibal again, hand caressing the man’s cheek. “Please don’t do this to me again, Hannibal.” The plea made Hannibal’s eyes open once more and Will could see the sleep pulling at the man, dragging him back under and Will was certain the moment he lied down he would be asleep too. “Please don’t lie to me, please don’t hide things from me. I couldn’t stand to live in a world without you in it. Promise me you won’t lie to me ever again. Please. Losing you terrifies me.”

“I promise, my darling boy,” Hannibal muttered, eyes sliding shut again. “I’m sorry. It will never happen again.”

“Sleep, Hannibal,” Will whispered, kissing Hannibal once more before he lied down himself, eyes closing. Will’s eyes opened abruptly at a weight against his chest and he glanced down at Hannibal with an adoring smile.

It wasn’t often that Hannibal let himself be held by Will and Will had just accepted it, thinking that Hannibal preferred to be the one more in control, more protective, and it was nice. Will enjoyed that he had somewhere safe to hide when everything became too much, but this was perfect in its own little way. It let Will see Hannibal in a more vulnerable light. Let Will know that he was just as needed as he was.

His arm circled around Hannibal’s waist, carefully of the wound in his side that would need to be cleaned again when the alarm went off. His other hand rested over Hannibal’s that was on his collar and he let his eyes close, drifting off immediately.

“Go away,” Walter grumbled as something jumped on the bed, waking him up from a night that was riddled with nightmares and not much sleep.

“I’m bored. Come play with me and Applesauce.”

Walter rolled over, pulling the blanket up and over his head, kicking at where Morgan was bouncing. His foot connected with something and there was a crash to the floor and Walter snickered under the blanket at an *ouch*.

“Leave me alone,” Walter said again, stronger than before. “I didn’t sleep last night.”

“Are you having nightmares?” Morgan asked curiously, not at all bothered by the fall to the ground. He was quickly back on the bed and bouncing again. “Get up.”

“What the hell is your problem kid?” Walter demanded, sitting up and facing the small boy with more anger than was probably needed, more anger than he had felt in the last few days. Morgan stopped bouncing, but he didn't look at all offended by the outrage, more so curious. “Of course I’m having nightmares. I watched my mom get shot in front of me. Why wouldn’t I have nightmares? I’ve been through a lot of shit.”

“Hanni wouldn’t approve of your-”

“I don’t really care what Hannibal Lecter approves of,” Walter hissed. “Go away.”

“Do you want to talk about it?” Morgan asked, head tipped to the side.

“Why does everyone keep asking me that?” Walter threw his hands up in the air and fell back onto the bed. “Yeah, sure. You want to know every horrible detail of what it feels like to have your mom ripped away from you, I’ll tell you.”

His words were biting, hoping that if the kid took the bait then maybe it would scare him off enough to leave Walter alone. It was annoying enough to have Alana hovering over his shoulder nearly every second of the day and now her son was doing the same. The only one that Walter enjoyed spending time with was Margot because she was more than happy to sit in silence if silence was what needed to be said.

“I have nightmares too,” Morgan said kindly, causing Walter to glanced at the boy who had stopped moving unnecessarily and was sitting with blue eyes on Walter. “I keep having nightmares about drowning.”

“Drowning?” Walter asked softly.

“Water scares me now.” Morgan shifted so he was no longer on his knees, legs folded and hands on his knees. “I don’t like being near it.”

“Because of the dreams?” Walter slowly sat up, curious. Morgan shook his head. “Then why?”

“Please don’t tell my moms that I remember. They will send me to the doctors again and I don’t like the doctors,” Morgan muttered, looking down at the bed spread, fingers playing with a crease in it. “I was kidnapped. They put me in a pond and someone held me under the water. It was weird. I could feel my lungs screaming for air, but I couldn’t let myself breathe.” Morgan tipped his head to the side in thought and Walter looked over the kid curiously, trying to see if he was telling the truth. “It was like my brain was saying, Holding our breath is killing us, and breathing in might not kill us, so we might as well breathe in. And it burned. I remember it burning and then it went dark. I woke up in the hospital.”

“How did you get out.”

“Hanni saved me.” Morgan’s voice was light and he wore a smile.

Walter’s brows furrowed and he gave a curt huff of air with a roll of his eyes. “He didn’t save you.”

“My mom said he did,” Morgan argued, definitely. “Hanni isn’t mean like everyone says he is.”

“He held a knife to my throat,” Walter shot back, once more annoyed and wanting the kid to disappear.

“I’m sure you deserved it.” Morgan stuck out his tongue at Walter and Walter glared back. “What happened to your mom?”

“Why do you want to know?” Walter grumbled, falling back onto his pillow to look up at the ceiling with a yawn. His eyes burned with lack of sleep, but he wasn’t sure if he could fall back to sleep now. His mind was far too busy. “What’s wrong with you?” Morgan gave a small hum that sounded like he was shrugging and Walter frowned as the boy lied down beside him, head on the same pillow. “Get away from me.” Walter sat up and snatched at the pillow, sending Morgan’s head dropping to the mattress and Walter turned away from the kid, covering his face with the pillow. Maybe he could suffocate himself. That would get him out of this.

“It’s not like I’m going to tell my mother if you do tell me. I know she likes to pick at people and their problems,” Morgan’s now muffled voice said and Walter scrunched up his eyes, teeth clenched tightly. “Your secret is safe with me.”

“It’s not a secret,” Walter said, unsure if he could be heard from under the pillow that encased him in darkness. The fabric closest to his face was beginning to grow hot and damp with his breath, but he didn’t dare leave the small safety he had created.

“Then tell me what happened,” Morgan challenged, obviously not leaving until Walter did.

Walter pushed the pillow from his face with an agitated sigh and sat up, leaning against the wooden headboard of the bed, looking over the kid. Morgan's face was calm and waiting and Walter frowned more.

"Hannibal was living with my dad in my house. My mom and dad were going through a divorce, so I was living with my grandparents. We went home to grab some of our things and Hannibal was there," Walter explained, not sure if he was giving away far too many details. "One of my dad's coworkers showed up and tried to get my mom and I out. My dad took us out to the car and there were some gunshots from the house. Both Hannibal and Jack raced out of the house and Jack tried to shoot Hannibal and the bullet hit my mom." Walter gave a small shrug and Morgan looked over him oddly.

"And you're ok?"

"No, but no one needs to know that," Walter grumbled. "They'll just try to get me to talk about how I feel and I don't think I need to explain how much that sucks."

"No," Morgan agreed softly. "But you can always talk to me. It's not like I have anyone but the dog to tell anyways. And Applesauce won't tell a soul."

Walter gave a small smile. "Do you not have classes today?"

"It's Saturday. Usually I just play with Applesauce in the yard unless my moms have something planned. They usually end up dragging me along with them. They won't let me stay home alone and they probably won't ever again after what happened." Morgan gave a bright smile that made Walter's fall. "I can let you sleep if you need though. I'm sorry I woke you. I don't have many friends. None that I like anyways." Morgan pushed himself from the bed and headed for the door. "Bye Wally."

"Let me get dressed and I'll come meet Applesauce," Walter offered, trying to be kind.

"Ok," Morgan said excitedly, racing from the room.

"Shit," Will hissed, going back to a TV channel that he had flipped past. He set the remote down and templed his hands at his chin as he looked over spotty security footage of him breaking into the animal shelter. He had been so concerned with Hannibal that he hadn't even considered the fact that the street would have cameras. He couldn't see his face in the grainy footage, the camera angle thankfully in his favor, but the truck would be recognizable.

He turned off the TV and went for the bedroom, stepping into it and looking over a sleeping Hannibal. A guilt washed through him at waking up the man, but it was nearly time for his next dose of medicine anyway. Will might as well get it ready.

Will gathered the items from the bathroom and sat on the edge of the bed. He reached out a hand and brushed Hannibal's silver locks from his face and maroon eyes flickered open tiredly.

"Time for your medicine," Will said with a gentle smile. Hannibal gave a nod and slowly sat up, a hand pressing into his side as he rested back against the headboard of the bed with a deep breath that bordered on a sigh. "Hannibal," Will said as he opened and began mixing the first of the medicine. "There's something else."

“What?” Hannibal asked softly as he reached out for his water.

“There were cameras outside of the animal shelter. They’re showing the footage on the news.” Hannibal’s movements stilled and he looked over at Will before fetching the glass of water and taking a sip of it. “They didn’t get my face, but the truck will be noticeable. We need to get rid of it.”

“I’ll take care of it,” Hannibal stated, sitting up determinately. Will reached out and easily pushed Hannibal’s weakened body back and Hannibal closed his eyes tightly, licking at his lips. “I know Vermont. I can-”

“You said you weren’t supposed to be out of bed for the next two or three days,” Will reminded sternly. “You are not going anywhere.”

“Will,” Hannibal argued, though his eyes were still shut and his head was tipped back against the headboard, sweat gathering on his brow. “You’re going to get lost.”

“I think I did a fair enough job last night,” Will grumbled. “I’m not a child.”

“That is not what I was implying in the slightest,” Hannibal mumbled with a bit of ice in his words. He set his cup aside and held out his arm to Will to give him his first round of the medications.

“I’ll ditch the truck,” Will assured, placing the used needle aside to get the next medication ready. “I’m sure I can find my way to a junkyard or something. I’m not inept as much as you think I am. I’m not some fragile little teacup. The finest china, used only for special guests.”

“No,” Hannibal agreed. “You’re the mongoose I want under the house when the snakes slither by.”

“Then let me be the mongoose, Hannibal,” Will grumbled, feeling the edge of a restless night bite further into his words. He really needed to sleep, but the nervous energy of the night before made it entirely impossible for him to settle and he had to deal with this issue sooner or later. “I’ve already gone this far. Might as well finish this off.”

“Am I chore to you?” Hannibal asked as he lowered his bruised arm back to the bed with closed eyes. “I’m sorry if I have-”

“Stop,” Will ordered with a deep sigh, throwing the used syringe angrily onto the bedside table. “God, shut up Hannibal. I am so tired of you.” Hannibal’s eyes flickered open and Will lowered his head into his hands with a small sob. “I’m sorry,” he whispered. “There’s still so much swirling through my head. I can’t get them to be quiet. I didn’t mean to silence yours. Yours is the voice that I want to hear, the voice that makes the storm go calm.”

“You need more sleep, Will,” Hannibal’s voice said cautiously as if he didn’t want to overstep. “You’re running on empty.”

Will gave a strangled laugh and rubbed at his face before he looked up at Hannibal through his fingers. “I’m too wired. Nearly wish I had something else to use with these needles.” Will got to his feet and began cleaning up the mess of boxes and needles, taking them to the bathroom to throw them away.

“Sometimes self-medication isn’t a bad thing,” Hannibal offered.

Will stared into the mirror at his bloodshot eyes, face that needed to be shaved, hair that needed to be cut. It was bugging him at the moment, the way it brushed against his ears and neck. He probably could have pulled it back with an elastic if he had one. Curiously, his hands reached up and he pushed his hair back and out of his face, gathering it behind him, looking over his reflection for a moment before letting the hair go and fall back into his face.

“Are you suggesting that I get high?” Will asked as Hannibal’s words finally processed into his mind.

“Would it help?”

Will thought about it for a moment, the same sentiment from the night before coming to mind when he had wanted a glass of whiskey. It was better to stay aware and alert. Especially if he was all over the news. They couldn’t relax. Not now. Not yet. Not until they were far away under aliases and where no one knew them.

“Not in the current situation,” Will replied, leaving the bathroom with a small exhale. “I’ll be back in time for your next dose. Get some sleep.” Will went for the door and had to force himself to stop at the voice that called him back.

“Will?” Will slowly turned back to the bed. “I love you. I hope that you understand that.”

Will gave a small nod. “I love you too, Hannibal. I’m sorry I snapped at you.”

“It seems that we could both use a moment.” Hannibal gave a faint smile that looked a little more on the fake side. “Take as long as you need. I’m not going anywhere. But please come back to me when you return so I can kiss you.”

Will felt something sharp twist in his chest and he found himself moving forward and toward the bed. He placed himself back at Hannibal’s side and placed his hands on either side of Hannibal, leaning over.

He pressed a kiss to Hannibal’s lips, holding it, but not deepening it. And his mind was pleasantly blank for a moment, the way it always went blank when Hannibal kissed him. The silencing god that controlled the storm in Will’s mind. He pulled back, the voices slamming painfully back into their home. He closed his eyes, feeling nearly in tears.

“I love you,” he whispered before placing another silencing kiss to the man’s lips. “As soon as you’re better, I want to be married to you, alright?”

“Will.”

“I’m not going through life without being married to you, even if we only last days after *I do*, I want to be tied to you. Forever tied to you.”

“Hurry home to me, my love.”

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brangiausias berniukas: dearest boy

Tu toks ypatingas man, rūpestingas berniukas: You are so special to me, caring boy

Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

> Will’s brows furrowed and he looked over the man suspiciously. “You are parked outside of the police station. You know what and who I am. You know who I’m with. You are more than very well aware that I have a gun ready to be aimed at your head, and you’re offering to help me,” Will pointed out, a little breathless. “Why in the hell would you want to help me?”

Chapter Notes

> Hey peeps. It has been an insanely insane week and I am about to tell ya'll all about it because I don't have an appointment with my therapist until next week. XD.
> So.... I work several jobs. This week at my retail job I got made a manager, which is great. More money and whatnot, but also more responsibility. Been working super long hours and training and all that good jazz. It all kinda started on a day where I looked at the wrong schedule and showed up 4 hours early to my shift on the third of July, which is one of the days that was celebrating Independence day because I live in a super religious state and God forbid we have a BBQ and shoot of fire works on a Sunday! Lord. Anyways. Had to battle parade traffic and then showed up and just decided that I lived too far away to battle that insane show again and would just work the extra hours. No biggie. Good paycheck.
> That night I was trained on closing registers and we had to count the tills like 5 times over. First the MOD counts the till and then I did to be trained on the paper work and how to fill it out all and then we had a new girl starting, same girl I will mention later, who needed to be trained on how to count the till as well. So, till got counted multiple times, had a giant deposit, and that was that.
> Had store set because we had a bunch of shipment of new things show up. We have four major sales starting this week, and then the regional, national and some other head manager-ceo thing are showing up today to do a giant store inspection after literally three days of holiday because my state can't make up it's mind on what day to celebrate.
> Ok! So... go to about two days later, us three same peeps are working the opening shift. My MOD takes me to the bank to do deposits. Cool. Bank screws something up on the deposit that we counted 500 billion times and says we're missing money. I know we're not missing money and they've lost it. They tell us they'll look for it, because the store was opening and we had to get back and they would call us. Get back to the store and we're supposed to be deep cleaning this bitch to high heaven because of all the important people coming around. Luckily we were slow. So, cleaning, cleaning, cleaning. MOD goes on her break, my other co-worker, sweetest old lady ever, says she's feeling dizzy and needs to sit down. Fine. We're slow, go sit down. I check on her several times to make sure she's ok. Her hands are shaking but she says she's alright. She in the back by the dressing rooms. Go to the front counter to grab the mess of hangers there from a giant purchase to take them to the back and organize. Was gone for literally like 10 seconds. Come back and she's having a full on seizure. Luckily, my MOD didn't leave the store. Grabbed her, called 911. Paramedics show up, we close the store, people are pissed off at us for closing the store. They can all screw themselves honestly.
> They get my coworker stable, after both my MOD and I had to perform CPR because this poor

lady stopped breathing and went unresponsive. Her vitals are good, apparently she has a history of seizures that was not listed in her medical paperwork. Anywhoooo- call her emergency contact who lives like an hour away. We decide, since she's stable, to keep the store closed until she gets picked up. Medics leave, police leave, security leaves, mail dude who showed up right then and there to pick up packages, leaves empty handed.

People are losing their cotton pickin minds. We put a sign up saying that due to medical emergencies, we're closed for the next one to two hours. We'll open the store back up at about this time. I can not believe how many people do not give a flying shit as to whether or not someone has had multiple seizures and has stopped breathing. All they did was bitch and complain. More on that in a bit.

MOD has to call people and make incident reports. I'm sitting with poor new girl just to make sure she's ok, getting her water and whatnot. Hands start shaking again and I pull the water from her, grab the phone once more, yell for my MOD and the poor girl is having another fit, these ones lasting longer. It wasn't even like 15 minutes later.

She went unresponsive and stopped breathing again, multiple times. MOD and I both had to do CPR again while trying to unlock doors for the medics who came back, security who freaking wanted their own incident report and could not see the phone in my hand and that I was speaking to dispatch, and then our poor mail guy showed up again to get the mail and had to be turned away once more.

Medics show up and take her to the hospital this time, all while customers are yelling at us through the gate because we aren't open. You're literally watching a poor old lady being rolled out on a stretcher and you are upset because you can't go shopping. Get out of my store!

The rest of the story will be down below at the end notes!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

LOSING YOU TERRIFIES ME

Will pulled into the junkyard as directed and put the truck in park. He climbed from the truck and took the screwdriver that had been given to him to remove the license plates. With them removed and shoved, with the screwdriver, into another car that had its roof smashed in, Will shoved his hands into his coat pockets and made his way out to the road.

He was a couple of miles outside of town, but he hadn’t been on a walk in a long while. The air was finally starting to get warmer with a hint of spring on the breeze and Will took off down the road, enjoying the dull sunlight from behind grey clouds.

Will had hoped that the walk would help clear his head. Help him find a way to shove out all of the voices that were continuously shouting for his attention. Voices that were beginning to call others forward. Voices from the past that Will had long since forgotten and others that had finally stopped haunting him. It was starting to give him a headache and made his stomach churn and he finally decided that he needed to let them have a voice once and for all or they would never leave him alone.

“I miss you dad,” a happy voice said from a blue eyed, dark haired girl in a summer dress with dirty knees. “You don’t talk to me anymore.”

“Not now, Abigail,” Will said with a sigh. “Please.”

Abigail skipped after him through the melting snow, feet bare against the black top. “I’m glad you have Walter now, but I still exist too, you know.”

“Abby, later. I promise I’ll give you time.”

The girl pouted, but slowly morphed in a swirling cloud of smoke into a woman that Will had thought had left him for good and he felt a little lightness in his chest at the sight of her dark hair and red leather jacket.

“You’re being a little unstable, Will,” Beverly said with that sideways open mouthed smile, her tongue to the back of her teeth, that she liked to use. She shoved her hands into her coat pockets and kept up with Will’s pace. “I should warn you to make sure you check your elbow when you get home.” Will paused for a moment, glancing down at his elbow that was still housed in his coat. He had never actually removed the jacket from himself after he had broken into the animal shelter. There had been a dull and ever present ache, but it wasn’t until now that he noticed a deep and distracting pulse in the bone there. “It might need some medical attention.”

“I will keep that in mind,” Will said with a grateful nod, though he was more focused on his elbow now than he was on the task of clearing his head that he had attempted to start. He began walking again. “I’m glad you’re back, but you’re not who I need to speak to at the moment.”

“Of course,” Beverly stated with a sarcastic smirk to her tone. “I’m sure Jack will be more of the voice you want bellowing in your mind at the moment.”

“I should get him out of the way,” Will said with a small smile. “The bellowing will wear me out.”

“Good luck, pretty boy,” Beverly teased with her kind and bright smile before she too gave way to a smoky departure and made way for the intimidating man by the name of Jack Crawford.

“How long did you think that you could keep him a secret, Will?” Jack asked, pace strong with Will’s. “How long did you think you would be able to hide him?”

“Indefinitely,” Will replied softly, inhaling deeply of the air and closing his eyes for a moment while he walked. “It was wonderful. It felt like I had what you and Bella had for a moment. Why did you come and ruin it all Jack? Why did you have to stick your nose into places it didn’t belong?”

“Will, what happened to you?”

Will groaned at the question. The same one that everyone always asked him. He rolled his eyes and hurried his pace a little more, wishing it would somehow leave his imagination behind him in his wake.

“You were this brilliant man with this future ahead of him. A little odd, to be sure, but amazing at what you did,” Jack pressed. “Quiet, shy, respectable.”

Will snorted and did his best to look down at his feet as a car passed by him on the road. He would look like a psychopath if someone found him talking to himself out loud in a very one sided conversation and he didn't need the attention.

"Jack, we both knew exactly what was in me," Will argued once the car motor had faded into the distance. "There was a reason you kept having me go to therapy. You just happened to pick the wrong therapist for you and the right one for me."

"The right one? He's screwed up, Will. There's something so very wrong about him," Jack shot back in his normal desperate pleas. "Something so very wrong about what he did to you."

"He opened my eyes, Jack. Why can no one seem to understand that?" Will pulled a hand from his pocket and rubbed at his face. "This darkness has always been part of me. Ever since I was little it was there. I pushed it down, hid it away. I don't want to do that anymore. And he makes me not afraid of it. There aren't nightmares anymore. There aren't terror sweats or me drowning myself in alcohol anymore. He's made me better. I feel whole. I finally feel like myself and I wish I could have met the man earlier in my life. It would have saved me a lot of hassle."

"You've killed people Will," Jack pointed out harshly.

"Only ever in self-defense." Will exhaled sharply, the pain in his elbow becoming a little more prominent at the angle it was in and Will let his hands drop to the sides. "And you've killed people too, Jack."

"I haven't enjoyed killing them, Will," Jack said, voice a shouted whisper as if the world could hear what Will's mind was yelling at him.

Will rolled his eyes. "Look, I'm never going to be the surrogate son you wanted or whatever you were trying to make me. I've already disappointed one father, I don't need to disappoint two. Goodbye Jack."

"I'm sorry, Will," Jack called, having fallen behind in step. Will stopped at the words and turned back around to face Jack. "About Molly. I didn't-"

"I really don't want to hear it Jack." Will turned away and started walking again. "She was still a good friend. It hurts just the same."

Will fell silent again as another car stopped beside him and he gave it a glance before continuing on his way up the street. The Nissan followed him and a window rolled down. He did his best to ignore the face of a man in his early thirties.

"You're a ways away from town," he said as he pushed the car at barely a crawl. "Do you want a ride?"

"No," Will stated with a shake of his head, catching Jack watching him curiously. "Thank you for the offer. I'd prefer to walk."

"It's another three miles," the man continued.

Will frowned. And then another two or three back to his home. It would take him an hour or two. He supposed he could attempt running it, but he was far too tired and stressed to want to make his legs move faster than they were, and he couldn't remember the last time he had to run a mile, though he recalled it took him about 11 minutes to run the mile and a half back in the police academy, but that was so very long ago now. A much younger and better in shape Will Graham. He would have to fix that if he truly planned to run with Hannibal across the globe in their new life.

“And it looks like rain.”

Will gave a sigh and fixed the glasses on his nose that had slipped down, eyes looking anywhere but to the man. Will wanted to spout off the statistics of how idiotic picking up a hitchhiker was, how likely someone was to meet a murderer in their life time, but he held his tongue. The numbers really weren’t that impressive, but they still held the weight that the man should have kept driving instead of offering his help to someone he didn’t know. But then again, most murders were committed by people that one would know personally. That didn’t change the fact that Will was the wrong person to be picking up outside of town.

His eyes met the driver’s and Will stared for a moment. Father, husband. Hard worker. Not rich, not poor. Comfortable. Desk job. Maybe something in engineering. Kind. No ulterior motives other than wanting to help.

Will gave a sigh. “Alright,” he muttered. He really did need to get back to Hannibal. He needed more medicine and Will didn’t want to miss a dose and send Hannibal back into a fevered death. He moved to the other side of the car and climbed into the passenger’s side. He pulled on his seatbelt and rested back into the seat, feeling sleep wanting to drag him down in the heat of the vehicle. “Thank you.”

“Where are you coming from?” the man asked as he pulled back onto the road. “There’s nothing in the direction you were coming from for the next like ten miles. You didn’t walk all that way, did you?”

Will thought over the words for a moment, debating what to tell the man. “I got in a fight with my wife and she made me get out of the car.” It wasn’t a lie, per say. Molly had done just that to Will before. But she had come back a minute or two later, feeling guilty about the act. And it wasn’t like the fight was that big of a deal. Something about dinner if Will remembered correctly. Will gave a small laugh. “I thought she would have come back.”

The man gave a chuckle and a nod. “When you get home, I would suggest groveling. Happy wife, happy life and all that.”

“Who was the wise guy that came up with that?” Will asked back with a smile. One he pulled from another swirling voice in his head. One of his professors at school who was constantly sarcastic and happy. One that Will had found himself attracted to in an observational sense. The man had been nothing like anyone else that Will had met before and he was an interesting study. His personality helped when Will had to be personable. It wore him out to put on the face, but it made the situation more durable.

“No kidding.” The man gave another small awkward laugh in the space between them. “I haven’t seen you around town. Do I know your wife?”

“We just moved in,” Will replied, glancing into the rearview mirror where he could make Jack out in the back seat. Will’s smile dropped at those knowing dark eyes that stared back at him.

“I see.” The kind man gave a thoughtful nod. “And what happened to your arm?”

“Arm?” Will asked softly, doing his best to ignore the large man behind him that still hadn’t blown away and back into his head yet. It sent an anxiety through him, as if Jack knew where they had run to. Knew exactly where Will was in this precise moment.

“Your coat is all bloody.”

“Oh.” Will glanced down at his arm where his coat, indeed, had some small patches of blood that were hardly noticeable, but obviously noticeable enough for the man to see. “I tripped over a rock on my way back into town. Must have scraped up my elbow when I fell.”

He looked up to meet the man’s face and looked over it carefully, so used to reading Hannibal’s micro expressions that it was nearly a shock to see the disbelief so clearly plastered over the man’s face. He knew. Will knew he did. The question was, what was the man going to do about it and what was Will going to have to do in turn? Even if Jack was in the back seat, staring at him, Will would do what needed to be done.

And the man was playing a dangerous game. He really should have let it drop, along with Will. He should have pulled over at the very edge of town and let Will out of the car. He should have forgotten having ever seen Will and let it all fade away. But instead, he kept talking, kept driving through town and Will could feel the tension mounting.

“You don’t have a wedding ring.”

Will chewed on his tongue for a moment, eyes out of the window, making careful calculations of where they were going so he could find his way out of the still new and strange place.

“Widowed,” Will offered out in way of explanation. There was no point in lying anymore. Not when he could see their destination at the end of the street.

“You were ditching the truck in that old junk yard, weren’t you?” he asked, the car turning icy despite the unbearable heat from the air vents. “The truck from the news? What were you getting from the animal shelter?”

“Medicine.” Will gave a sigh and sat up a little straighter in his seat, hand reaching down for his gun, ready to pull it if needed as the car came to a stop outside of the police station.

The man gave an odd sort of blink before turning his head to meet Will’s. Will glanced over, waiting for what was coming next. Waiting for the deciding moment. Waiting for the fork in the road to be taken.

“What did you need the medicine for?”

“A friend is sick,” Will muttered, heart steady in his chest. Surprisingly steady for what he was about to do. Steady despite the fact that Jack Crawford had leaned forward from the back seat and had a hand tight on Will’s shoulder. “He can’t go to the hospital.”

The man gave a small and understanding nod, before turning back to the look out the windshield. He looked incredibly calm for someone who knew the position they were in.

“You’re Will Graham, aren’t you?” he asked in an undisturbed voice.

“It would be better for you if you didn’t know my name,” Will answered softly, eyes still watching the man carefully, but there was no hostility of any kind from him and Will’s earlier observation came back to him.

Kind. No ulterior motives other than wanting to help.

“It was all over the news,” the man pressed on, causing Will to unlock the latch on his gun, hand ready. He inhaled deeply, waiting for the next words. Just waiting. That’s all he could do. “Where’s the boy?”

“My son?” Will asked curiously, his chest a little less tight at the thought of Walter. “Safe. With some friends that are taking care of him. Why?”

“The news said that Dr. Lecter kidnapped the two of you.” The man once more turned to look at Will and Will quickly avoided his gaze, eyes dropping to the man’s chest where Will would send the bullets. He could see the blood staining the man’s shirt, turning it crimson with blooming fire lilies. “He didn’t though, did he? You went with him.”

“Yes.” It was barely more than a whisper.

“And he’s sick?”

“Yes.”

“And you’re helping him.”

“Yes,” Will repeated, licking at his lips, a nervousness filling him at a group of officers passing by the car as they entered the station. But none of them seemed to notice the two men in the car, a conversation that they could have stopped. A conversation that they could save the man from because if there was one wrong move, one wrong word, he would be dead.

“I went to medical school for a time before I changed professions. I can look over him if you would like, though I’m certain I am nowhere near as good of a doctor as he is.”

Will’s brows furrowed and he looked over the man suspiciously. “You are parked outside of the police station. You know what and who I am. You know who I’m with. You are more than very well aware that I have a gun ready to be aimed at your head, and you’re offering to help me,” Will pointed out, a little breathless. “Why in the hell would you want to help me?”

The man gave a small laugh, something nervous and unsure. “I didn’t think that killers could be afraid of things,” he said thoughtfully. “What do monsters have to be afraid of?” Will was silent, unsure of what to say in response as he finally met the man’s face with his gaze, a kind sort of smile on his lips. “Losing someone,” the man answered for Will. “You’re just as afraid of losing a person as the rest of us are. And you’re losing him, aren’t you Will?”

“You’re smarter than I pegged you as,” Will muttered. “Medical school?”

“Was almost done with the course, actually,” he explained with a small nod. “But I enjoyed drawing a bit more. Used to win prizes for competitions. I’m in architectural drafting and design now.”

“You still haven’t answered why,” Will grumbled, once more feeling like sinking into his seat at another group of officers walking by the car.

“If my wife were sick and dying, I would do anything to help her,” the man continued. “Despite any sins, a person that needs help should be helped. Love the sinner, not the sin, right?”

Will frowned, upset with himself for considering the idea. “And if I say yes?”

“You let me look over him and we part ways.”

“Just like that?” Will asked skeptically.

The man gave a nod. “Just like that.”

“You’re not going to turn us in?” Will’s eyes were sharp, hand tightening on the gun still at his side, still safely held in its holster. The man shook his head. “How can I trust you?”

The man gave a small shrug. “You can’t.”

“And why shouldn’t I kill you now?”

The man shook his head with a small smile. “You’re not the same kind of monster, Will. At least, I don’t think you are like Dr. Lecter. You’re still a monster, you just haven’t let yourself go like Dr. Lecter has. You still have that light in you.”

Will hissed through his teeth, mind reeling with everything that was rushing through it. Still sharp voices demanding attention and now a new person, a new face with information that could break Will. Information that would ruin them. Information that would get each of them sent to death row.

“When was the last time you slept, Will? You look like you’re about to have a break down. You were up all night with him, weren’t you? Making sure he was still breathing?”

“How do you know that?” Will asked softly, his free hand running through his hair.

“I had a girlfriend in college,” the man explained easily, as if he were speaking with an old friend and it struck Will as odd. He shifted uncomfortably as the man continued. “She suffered from leukemia. Towards the end, there would be days she wouldn’t wake up. I stayed by her bedside until she did, watching her chest rise and fall, making sure she didn’t die on me.”

“That’s why you went into engineering,” Will whispered with a small nod. “You couldn’t handle losing another person.”

“And you’re losing a person, Will.”

“He-he’s doing better,” Will tried to reason, but he was slowly deteriorating in his resolve to kill this man. He was so tired, so spent. He wanted to cry again, but he wouldn’t let himself. All he wanted to do was let someone else take control, someone like Hannibal. Hannibal always protected him, always made sure he was strong and safe and with Hannibal gone, Will felt like he would crumble, his strength depleted if Hannibal’s was. “He’ll be fine.”

“You don’t believe that, do you?” The man’s head tilted to the side. “Why did you leave his side?”

Will bit back a choked sob, making it a lump in his throat that he tried to push away with a dry swallow. He really needed to stop talking. He needed to get out of this car. He needed to go back to Hannibal. “I had to ditch the truck,” Will grumbled. “To stop things like this from happening.” Will motioned between the two of them. “To keep him safe. If he lives, then he will be safe.”

“If?”

Will corrected with a shout. He bit at his bottom lip with a deep exhale through his nose, but the man didn’t seem shakable. “Why won’t you turn us in?”

“I’m not stupid. If the TV shows my wife watches are anything to go on, you won’t hesitate to kill me for self-preservation. Even if my wife and the police did come after you, if I had anything to do with it, you would find a way to get rid of me. I wouldn't dare put my family at risk like that.”

“You’re parked outside of the police station,” Will reminded coldly.

“You can turn yourself in,” the man suggested. Will shook his head slowly, confused. “You won’t leave him, will you?”

“No.”

“Then let me help him and you. We both get something out of this. You get to keep Dr. Lecter by your side, and I get to go home to my family tonight.”

“You are more than well aware that Hannibal won’t change, right?” Will asked, latching the gun in his holster, and adjusting himself in his seat. “If you save him, you are dooming others to die.”

“So are you.”

Will blinked at the words, trying to justify them, but he couldn’t come up with any other reason than the one that slipped past his lips. “I love him.”

“And we can look past the sins of people we care deeply for,” he agreed with a small nod. “Look, my want of self-preservation is just as strong as yours. I’m offering you help. You don’t have to take it. You can leave this car and walk back home and I will go home to my family that is expecting me.”

“Stop trying to make yourself sound more human,” Will hissed angrily, tired. He rubbed at his burning eyes with a deep sigh. “I wasn’t going to kill you.”

“Yes, you were.”

Will was silent for a moment before he lowered his head into one of his hands. “Please,” he said, broken. Resolve dissolved completely. “Please help him.”

Will stopped with a hand on the bedroom door, turning back to look at Elijah, nearly wishing he hadn’t learned the man’s name. Will gave a sigh.

“Don’t mind anything he says,” Will muttered. “He won’t like you, will probably hate me for bringing you here.”

“I’m sure I can handle it,” Elijah assured with a small nod. “I did have to do residencies. I know people aren’t their best when they’re ill or having to be open around strangers.”

Will gave a small nod and opened the bedroom door, stepping into the room and heading over to the bed where a body was laying, resting. Elijah followed until the foot of the bed and stopped, watching curiously at the interaction between the two men. Something so sweet and soft between them, when the world only saw the blood, guts and gore.

“Hannibal,” Will whispered, fingers gently brushing at the man’s hair. “Wake up, Hannibal.”

The man stirred, though still looked very out of it and Elijah moved a little closer to see the feverish looking man. Weak and unable to move, something very different than the man described in books and in true crime tv shows. The lion reduced to being the mouse.

“Hello, Dr. Lecter,” Elijah said, coming to stand beside Will, who looked a little nervous. Was he afraid of the killer? “My name is Eli. I’m here to check up on you.” There was a sharpness to the man’s odd colored eyes and Elijah looked over him in interest. The predator ever present, even in his weakened state, always on the prowl and ready to protect himself. “Will said that you had sepsis. Do you mind if I take a look?”

“Get out,” Hannibal instructed in a dull tone and Elijah wondered what the voice sounded like in its full power. “Will, you-”

“Please Hannibal,” Will said softly, hands resting on the killer’s chest running up and down it soothingly. “I need help. You know this. I can’t take care of you alone. I have no idea what I’m doing.”

“I do,” Hannibal argued, voice a touch stronger. “I am more than capable of walking you through-”

“Please!” Will begged, something broken in his voice as his hands clutched at the fabric of Hannibal’s t-shirt. “Please let him help.”

There was an agitated sigh from the doctor, but his eyes softened as he looked over Will. “Alright, beautiful boy.” Will gave the killer a kiss and Elijah felt like he was intruding on something extremely private that the world wasn’t meant to be privy to. “Can you go get me some water?” Elijah wasn’t sure if Will caught onto the suggestion that Will leave the room, but Will gave a nod and got to his feet assuring his return before exiting the room and closing the door behind him. “Eli?” Hannibal’s eyes returned to Elijah, gaze serrated and edged. “I’m not sure what you did to convince my-”

“I’m simply here to help,” Elijah interrupted in as kind of a voice as he could make it. “Will looked like he was about to have a mental break.”

“He’s been through a lot,” Hannibal murmured, slowly pushing himself up in bed and resting back against the headboard, face turning into a frown at what Elijah assumed was a wave of nausea.

“How did you convince him to run away with you?” Elijah asked curiously, moving to casually sit beside the killer, taking Will’s place. That didn’t go unnoticed by Hannibal who looked displeased at Elijah’s presence. “After you killed his wife and everything.”

“I didn’t kill her. The news isn’t always right and neither are official police reports.” Hannibal licked at his lips and closed his eyes, head resting back against the headboard, mouth twisted in pain. “And I didn’t convince him. He offered.”

“You two are very honest to a stranger,” Elijah pointed out. “I could probably write my own book with how much you’ve both let slip.” Hannibal’s eyes opened with a warning look. Elijah let the man look over him for a moment, coming to a conclusion that he shared.

“But you aren’t going to.” Elijah shook his head in answer. “Why not?” Hannibal asked, though he didn’t seem too terribly interested in anything but getting more sleep.

“Will and I came to a beneficial agreement,” Elijah replied. “My silence for my safety. Now, Dr. Lecter, do you mind showing me your injury?”

“Are you a doctor?” Hannibal questioned as he slowly shifted to pull his shirt up enough to expose some bandaging that Elijah glanced over. It wasn’t professional in any sense of the word. It looked like something Will slapped on, doing his best to take care of the man. Being an officer, Elijah knew that Will had a basic understanding of medical care, but it was more along the lines of CPR to help as a first responder than it was to heal any type of infection. “I seem to find myself having issues with any medical help other than my own hands.”

“But you trust Will to help you?” Elijah reached out and pulled at the medical tape holding the gauze to Hannibal’s skin and glanced over his shoulder as the door opened and Will stepped in with a glass of water. Hannibal didn’t answer the question, just took the outheld glass when Will got close enough.

“Thank you love,” Hannibal said with a kind smile that Elijah guessed was only shown to Will.

“Will, have you been giving him any sort of pain killers?” Elijah asked as he finished pulling back the gauze.

“No,” Will answered with a sigh. “He hasn’t been awake enough to take any pills. I’ve barely been able to get him to eat more than a bite or two of soup.”

“Would you mind getting me the medications you have been giving him and then getting some tylenol or ibuprofen?” Elijah instructed, turning on the bedside lamp to better see what he was working with. “It will make it more pleasant for him to rest if he isn’t in any pain.”

“Ok,” Will muttered, heading for the bathroom that was off to the side.

“And can you get me a cleaning agent and some more gauze, William?”

“It’s just Will,” the voice from the bathroom corrected Elijah.

“You didn’t answer my question,” Hannibal pointed out, calling Elijah’s eyes to the doctor’s face that was covered lightly in sweat and eyes that were closed once more in exhaustion.

“No. Not a doctor. I dropped out of med school.” Elijah could see a frown on Hannibal’s lips. “Your injury. What was it from?”

“A kitchen knife,” Hannibal answered, once more licking at his lips.

“Drink the water, Dr. Lecter,” Elijah instructed, glancing back up as Will returned to the room. He held out several boxes that Elijah took. He made sure Hannibal was following his order before he gave Will a small smile as Will set several wrapped syringes on the bedside table. “Thank you. Bring in some soup when you bring in the painkillers, if you would.”

“Alright.” Will slowly turned and went for the door.

“And Will?” Elijah called after the man, watching the man stop and turn back around. “You’ve been doing a good job taking care of him.” There was a look of relief that settled over Will’s features and he nodded before leaving the room once more. Elijah turned back to Hannibal and inhaled deeply. “He’s a bit odd, isn’t he?” Hannibal’s gaze was dark at the accusation. “This weird mashup of conflict within himself.”

“He’s still trying to decide who he is,” Hannibal agreed, though his eyes didn’t soften as he set the half-finished glass of water aside. “I can wait for him and be happy with whatever path he decides to take.”

“You’re different than I expected you to be, Dr. Lecter.” Elijah looked at the boxes in his hands, reading over each one carefully before giving a decided nod. “He’s been giving you the right things for sepsis. How long have you had your fever?”

“A day or two. I’m not sure what day we’re on,” Hannibal replied. “It’s been a bit of a blur.” He sighed, eyes sliding closed once more. “What were you expecting?”

“An unforgiving devil,” Elijah said with a small smile, setting the boxes aside and reaching for the antiseptic bottle that Will had left behind with some packs of gauze. “Not a man in love.” There was a small laugh from Elijah, but Hannibal didn’t bother greeting it with opening his eyes. “He has been taking good care of you, just not of himself.”

“He needs to sleep,” Hannibal agreed, wincing as something cold was placed to his ribs, burning with its chemical makeup. “I think he slept for a few hours, but not enough. And with his wife and son...” Hannibal trailed off with a sigh, letting the sentence go. “He’s been through a lot and hasn’t had the time to process it yet.”

“That’s unhealthy.” Elijah set the gauze he had used to clean the cut with aside and reached for a new pack. “I will need to look at his arm when I’m done with you.”

“His arm?” Hannibal’s eyes flickered open and he sat up a little more, attentive. “What happened to his arm?”

“He used his elbow to shatter a window to get your medication. His jacket sleeve has blood on it. I’m under the assumption that he hasn’t taken care of it.”

Hannibal hissed something in another language and looked like he was going to try to remove himself from the bed, but leaning forward was enough to send him right back to where he had been against the headboard. He groaned, teeth bared and Elijah snatched up a hand that tried to go to the wound that he had just cleaned.

“You do not get to leave this bed for at least the next day or two, Dr. Lecter. I’m sure you already know that.” Elijah let Hannibal’s hand go and it weakly dropped back to the bed. The man gave an upset huff, but didn’t argue. “And you need to stay on those antibiotics for at least another full week if not longer.”

“Where did Will find you?”

“More like I found him.” Elijah placed gauze over the cut and used some medical tape to hold it in place before helping the man pull his shirt back down. “Gave him a ride back to town.”

“He said yes?”

“I wasn’t about to take a no,” Elijah explained lightly. “When was your last round of medication?”

“He needs more in about thirty minutes,” Will answered as he entered the room once more. He made his way to the bed with a bowl of steaming liquid and a pill bottle that he held out to Elijah. Elijah took it and opened the bottle, knocking several white pills into his hand before placing them into Hannibal’s. Will set the bowl down on the bedside table and gave a deep breath. “Can I do anything else?”

“No thank you Will,” Elijah replied before Hannibal had a chance. “I will take a look over you in a moment.”

“Me?” Will asked in surprise.

“Your arm needs to be taken care of. For now, why don’t you go take a shower? It will help clean your arm and help you relax. You’re strung up a bit too much.” Elijah gave Will a smile. “You need rest. You need to sleep just as much as Dr. Lecter does. Go shower and I’ll look over your arm.”

Will bit his lip nervously, eyes going to Hannibal and Elijah watched curiously as Hannibal’s face once more softened as his attention fell on Will. “Go, dear boy. I’ll be here when you get back. I promise,” Hannibal assured. Elijah knew the tug on Will. He understood the anxiousness of leaving the man still stuck in bed. The want to be there if anything at all went wrong. “*Myliu tave, kvailas berniukas. Eik pasirūpink savimi.*”

Elijah watched as the odd language caught Will’s attention and the man nodded, heading for the bathroom after grabbing an extra set of clothes that weren’t bloody.

Elijah went back to work, a hand going to Hannibal’s forehead and feeling at the fever that was there. “Take those pills, Dr. Lecter. And then you need to eat some of that soup. You need more liquids in you. It would be good if we could get some orange juice or mint tea in you. Would you happen to have either?”

“Possibly the tea,” was Elijah’s answer.

“I will have Will make you some when he’s out of the shower. For now, would you mind letting me give you your antibiotics?” Elijah asked carefully. He watched the immediate dislike settle into Hannibal’s features, but eventually the man nodded his permission. “Take those pills, Dr. Lecter. I will not ask again. There are other ways to make you take them and I know you are more than aware of what they are and how unpleasant they can be.”

With a deep and pained sigh, Hannibal did as instructed before taking the bowl of soup from Elijah’s hand, bringing a shaky spoonful to his mouth. Elijah opened up the first box and carefully read the directions before mixing the two items in his hands.

“Continue to eat, Dr. Lecter,” he instructed, pulling one of the wrapped syringes to him and getting it ready with the appropriate dosage. “I want at least half of that bowl gone before you go back to sleep.” Hannibal grumbled something, but Elijah didn’t put much thought to it. He placed the needle carefully aside, before taking the closer of Hannibal’s arms, glancing over the dark bruising that was there from how many times the man had been poked, but all of the needle marks seemed to have hit their marks as they were intended, hinting that Will knew more about medical practices than Elijah thought he did. “Is Will trained medically?” he asked, eyes still locked on the markings in Hannibal’s arm.

“Nothing more than basic training from the police academy. Why?” Hannibal asked back, soup being set on the bedside table to allow more room to Elijah to work.

“He’s hit your vein dead on every time.”

There was a small chuckle from Hannibal at the words and Elijah looked up to find a fond kind of smile on the killer’s lips. “I didn’t believe him,” Hannibal whispered tiredly. “Drugs in his youth.”

Elijah gave a sound of acknowledgement as he reached for another pack of gauze to cover in antiseptic and cleaned at Hannibal’s abused arm, then cleaned a little lower than where Will had previously been marking the skin. He took the syringe back up and easily slid the needle into Hannibal’s arm.

The bathroom door opened and a wet heat filled the room, letting Will exit the bathroom, a towel drying his hair. Elijah looked over the man carefully, noting his freshly shaved face, no stubble left of the beard that had been there making the man’s face look much younger. And when the towel was tossed into an overflowing hamper, Elijah could tell that a good length of the curls had been removed, chopped off, nicely framing his face rather than the nearly homeless look Will had been sporting earlier.

“Will, do you mind making some tea? Mint is preferable if you have any.” Elijah asked and Will gave a small nod.

“*Brangus berniuk,*” Hannibal called to Will and Will stepped closer to the bed, making Elijah curious if Will understood what was being said to him or not. Elijah got to his feet, moving out of the way for Will to take a seat on the side of the bed. “You cut your hair,” Hannibal muttered, a trembling hand reaching out to stroke at the damp curls. Once again, Elijah had an overwhelming feeling of being out of place, witnessing something that he shouldn’t have been able to see. “You look so young, darling boy. You make me a little jealous.”

“You?” Will asked with a small smile.

Elijah stared, feeling as if he had been shut out of the world. That he had effectively been erased from existence. That the absolute only thing that was alive and drawing breath in the entirety of the universe were these two men. These monsters.

“I couldn’t make you jealous,” Will pressed on with a small laugh. “You’re too perfect.”

“*Pabučiuok mane prieš išvykdamas.*” Hannibal’s voice was demanding in a light sense, playful almost, the hand in Will’s hair tugging on it softly. Will must have either understood or gotten the hint of what Hannibal was wanting, because he leaned over and kissed Hannibal. Something deep. Something that made Elijah shift awkwardly. He was not meant to be here to see this. “Return to me soon, clever boy.”

Will rose from the bed, with a heat in his cheeks and moved past Elijah to exit the room. Elijah took the spot on the bed back and got the next medication ready. He didn’t say anything, but he could sense Hannibal’s eyes on him, something tight, almost as if they were daring Elijah to make a comment.

He took Hannibal’s arm and administered the next dose in silence. He tossed the second syringe aside and grabbed the bowl of soup, holding it out to Hannibal who took it.

“Eat some more and I’ll give you the rest,” Elijah instructed, as his hands moved to open the next box. “He really has been doing a good job. I would keep cleaning it once a day. It doesn’t look deep enough to need stitches. Keep taking your antibiotics, again, for at least the next week. Stay in bed for the next two or three days, though I would recommend a shower tomorrow while Will is changing your bandaging.” Elijah finally met Hannibal’s eyes, seeing something dark swirling there, not liking the orders that Elijah was giving him. “And let Will help you, Dr. Lecter. You’re in no position to care for yourself.”

There was a low growl of dislike from the killer, but Elijah didn’t let the emotion of discomfort slip over his face. He simply took the half-finished bowl of soup from the man’s hands and went back to giving Hannibal his medicine.

“And please let him sleep. Force him into bed if you must. He needs to recover as well,” Elijah continued, moving onto the final packaged needle. “Especially if his mind is as fragile as what Tattlecrimes suggests.” He could feel the glare from the killer on him and he gave a small knowing smile. “I take it that you do not approve of the platform.”

“I do not approve of the unjust speculations that the author pushes onto my fiancé.”

Elijah paused, looking up, last box half open in his hands. “Fiancé?” Elijah found himself asking, glancing towards the empty doorway. His attention went back to Hannibal who looked to be wearing a smile that Elijah couldn’t exactly place. “His wife just died.”

“They have been separated for nearly half a year,” Hannibal explained into the open. Elijah wasn’t exactly sure why he was given more information, but he wasn’t about to tell Hannibal the Cannibal to stop speaking. He didn’t want to be anywhere on the man’s bad side. “It was just a matter of the legality of their marriage being in the way.”

“But you didn’t kill her?” Elijah asked, still paused in his work. He watched Hannibal shake his head. “Did Will kill her?”

“He wouldn’t so much as say a cross word to the woman.”

“I find that difficult to believe.” The words were muttered under Elijah’s breath as he thought over the man that had been in the car with him, but he could tell Hannibal heard him from the way that Hannibal hissed sharply as if Elijah were a dog that had stepped out of line. “Who did kill her?”

“I don’t think it matters much.” Hannibal’s voice was low, anger in it, though he stayed restrained and Elijah was curious if he was always this controlled or if the illness had made him slip at all. It was almost a shame that Elijah wouldn’t be able to see the man at his full strength. “The matter is between that man and God now.”

Elijah went back to his work, mixing the drugs and filling up the syringe. Elijah glanced up as Will entered the room again, placing a mug with the tag of a tea bag hanging from the rim onto the bedside table.

“Last thing, Will,” Elijah said as he pushed the needle into Hannibal’s arm. “Please get an icepack if you would.” Without a word, Will left the room once more and Elijah pulled the needle free, quickly grabbing the antiseptic gauze and wiping at the area. He carefully packaged the needles back up as best he could, unsure where exactly to throw the items away. “Please drink that, Dr. Lecter. The whole thing if you can. You’re dehydrated, I’m sure. Have the painkillers kicked in?”

Hannibal gave a nod as he reached for the mug without a fight, though there was a sense of dislike in the air at still being told what to do.

“Good. I would like them to be added to your schedule of antibiotics.” Elijah got to his feet as Will entered the room once more. “Thank you Will.” He held out his hand and took the inactivated ice pack. “Your side of the bed, please. Sit.”

Will’s face frowned slightly, but he did as he was asked, sitting beside Hannibal, back against the headboard as well. Elijah did his best not to let his eyes linger as Will’s free hand took Hannibal’s, fingers intertwining. Elijah sat down and reached out, picking up Will’s arm, looking over the man’s elbow. It was bruised and there were several deep nicks in the skin from the glass that had cut through his jacket.

Elijah got from the bed and fetched a new gauze and the antiseptic, wetting the gauze as he moved back around the bed. He sat once more, taking Will’s arm and gently cleaning at it. Will inhaled sharply through his teeth at the burn, something that Hannibal hadn’t seemed to put much effort into.

“I don’t think you broke it,” Elijah muttered, looking carefully over the cuts that were there. “And you don’t need stitches, but I would like you to ice it and take some painkillers too. You’re going to be bruised for a while.”

“Alright,” Will said through gritted teeth.

“All in all, you’re lucky it wasn’t worse.”

“That seems to be the case as of late.”

Elijah gave a smile, but didn’t dare laugh at the joke, unsure of Hannibal would take it. Elijah set everything aside and got to his feet, fetching the bottle of medicine and giving Will several pills that the man took dry. He then activated the ice pack and Will took it, placing it to his elbow with a grimace. “Will, make sure you give Hannibal more painkillers when you give him his next round of medicine. He needs to keep taking these every four hours, which I assume is what you’ve been doing.”

“Yes. Every four hours,” Will agreed, stretching out his now free arm.

“Perfect,” Elijah answered with a nod, folding his arms over his chest. “Make sure that you keep giving them to him until at least next Saturday, though I would suggest maybe a day or two longer than that if you have enough to last him.”

“I will,” the man said with a determined nod.

“Make sure he finishes that tea before he goes back to sleep and then have him shower tomorrow. Help him. He’ll be weak on his legs.” Another nod was Elijah’s answer. “Keep him hydrated and make sure he eats every few hours. Maybe just keep everything on the same schedule as the antibiotics."

"I can do that."

"Now, as for you Will," Elijah continued, making the man tilt his head in question. "I want you to sleep. Sleep until you can't anymore and then keep sleeping. Do I make myself clear?" Will gave a small nod. "You will not be able to take care of Dr. Lecter or yourself if you do not rest. Your body will start to shut down if you aren't careful. Dr. Lecter, you do everything in your power to keep this man in bed and asleep. The only things he should be getting up for are to use the bathroom, eat and to give you your medicine until he is rested. Other than that, I believe that you two should be fine."

"Just like that?" Will asked carefully, pulling their conversation from in front of the police station to the forefront of Elijah's mind.

Elijah gave a firm and assuring nod. "Just like that." He glanced between the two men once more with a deep breath. "I can show myself out."

"No," Will said quickly, getting from the bed, ignoring the way Hannibal's eyes stayed on the man hungrily. "I'll walk you out." Elijah went for the door to the bedroom and Will followed closely behind him up the hallway and to the front door. Elijah reached for the front door, but stopped when Will spoke once more. "I..." Elijah turned to see Will with a nervous hand shaking out his hair, eyes down. The man had only met Elijah's eyes maybe twice since they had started speaking and Elijah wondered what bothered the man enough to put that much effort in keeping his eyes anywhere else in the room. "Thank you."

"You're welcome," Elijah replied with a tip of his head. "Just keep up your side of the deal."

"We won't come after you," Will assured.

"*We* won't or you won't?" Elijah clarified.

"*We* won't. You weren't rude and you helped both of us. As much as Hannibal might dislike you and me for bringing you here, you are safe. He doesn't have a reason to want you dead. Not unless you break your side of the deal."

"I will take this to the grave."

And Will watched, watched as the stranger left out the front door. Watched through the small window beside the door as the man got into his car and drove away and Will hoped that was the last he knew of Elijah.

"How do you continue to get so lucky?" Jack's voice asked from behind him and Will closed his eyes. The man wouldn't leave. He couldn't get Jack to disappear as if he were a spirit with unfinished business. "What do you do to ensure that you get away with everything?"

"I don't get away with everything," Will shot back sharply. "Go away Jack."

"He will tell someone."

“No, he won’t.” Will shoved his hands into his pockets and made his way into the kitchen to clean it. He put away the tea box and threw away the empty can of soup before heading to the sink to add the used dishes to the half full dishwasher. “He gave his word.”

“You can’t trust him, Will,” Jack said, leaning against the counter beside the sink. “You can’t trust anyone anymore. You’ve made sure of that.”

Will closed the dishwasher with a slam, hands going to his head. “What is it you want Jack? What will make you go away?”

“You accepting my apology,” was Jack’s response.

Will frowned. “No. You took her from me.” Will dried his hands on a towel and then got himself a glass of water, his mouth feeling dry.

“She wasn’t yours. You didn’t even want her.”

“You took her from Walter, then,” Will shot back, downing the glass of water before refilling it. “A boy who needed his mother, who watched her die, held her lifeless body.” Will sighed, the water forgotten on the counter. “Go away Jack.”

“I’m sorry.”

“No, you’re not! You knew what each one of them meant to me!” Will shouted, knees giving out under him. He lowered himself to the ground. “You knew exactly what you were doing, what you were trying to take from me and maybe I am fucked up that I’m glad it was Molly over Hannibal, but that doesn’t change the fact that she was someone in my life that meant something to me.”

“You’re right. I should have thought about it more.”

Will frowned. That wasn’t Jack. Will knew better. Jack just didn’t admit that someone was right, let alone Will. How long had Jack fought Will about Hannibal being the ripper? How long had Jack ignored Will’s breaking in favor of getting what he wanted? Jack was just as poisonous as Hannibal, but Will didn’t want to drink from this cup, so his mind was changing the FBI agent. His mind twisting the man to make him more palatable.

“I shouldn’t have taken the shot when I knew there was cross fire.”

Will pulled his knees to his chest and hid his face in his knees, hoping that it would somehow make Jack disappear. Out of sight, out of mind. Hopefully. But when Will finally had the courage to look up, he found the tall, broad shouldered man still standing there, eyes on Will.

“I’m incredibly sorry Will.”

“I know,” Will whispered, lowering his head back to his knees. “I know you are, but I’m not ready to forgive you just yet. Please leave me alone.” There wasn’t an answer and Will chanced another look to find himself finally alone. He pushed himself to his feet and rubbed tiredly at his eyes. His head wasn’t silent by any means, but at least this one voice was gone. He would have to deal with the rest of them later.

He found himself back in the master bedroom and closed the door behind him. He went to the windows and made sure the curtains were each pulled tightly closed, blocking out the still midmorning light. He turned back to the bed that was lit with a single lamp. Hannibal had placed his tea back on the bedside table and was once more asleep and Will moved over to check that it had been finished.

Finding that it had and his curiosity had been satisfied, Will pulled his shirt over his head and pulled off his pants, tossing them aside for a future Will, before he climbed into bed beside Hannibal, letting the lamp cast lazy shadows around the room.

“You were shouting,” Hannibal whispered, moving closer to Will and effectively trapping the empath to the bed with a heavy arm draped across Will’s middle. Hannibal’s face hid into Will’s neck and Will sighed into the warmth that Hannibal’s body brought him. “Was it Eli?”

“No,” Will answered in a voice just as soft as Hannibal’s. “I-I was dealing with Jack. He didn’t want to go away. In-In-In my head.”

“Close your eyes, Will,” Hannibal instructed in a worn out voice. Will licked at his lips and did as he was instructed. “Wade into the quiet of the stream. Let the voices be washed away by the current.” Will inhaled deeply, doing his best to picture the stream by his farm in Wolf Trap. All of the dogs he had saved over the years racing through the mud on the banks, the pull of the water against his legs as he readied his pole. “Very good, Will.” His breathing must have slowed to the point of noticeability. “Relax into the drag of the water. Feel the voices being pulled away from you. You’re safe. Your mind is a safe place for you.”

“Don’t stop talking, Hannibal,” Will whispered, body feeling heavy against the mattress. He let the plushness of it pull him down, let the strain in his muscles wash away, leaving him aching and tired. “I want your voice in my head.”

“Darling boy.” Will sighed audibly as a kiss was pressed into his throat. “You can pick and choose which voices you would like. It’s your head. Reel me back in if I’ve gotten too far away from you.”

Walter pulled the slobbery ball from Applesauce’s jaw and tossed it again as far as he could, watching as the dog raced after the bouncing ball. He wiped his hand on his pants and glanced down as Morgan laughed again. Every time Applesauce would race away, Morgan giggled, just proving how young the boy really was despite the large words that he liked to use.

“Why do you laugh so much?” Walter grumbled, annoyance settling into his body as he watched the dog finally track down the ball.

“I think the way her ears flop is funny,” Morgan answered, smile still on his face. There was a silence that fell over them as Applesauce ran back, avoiding Walter as he tried to reach for the ball. “Do you think your dad is coming back?”

Walter froze in his chase after the dog and slowly turned back to the boy. “Of course he is,” Walter replied sharply. “Why wouldn’t he?”

“My mom was talking with-”

“Look.” Walter straightened up and saw the kid take a small step back. “I don’t give a fly fuck about what your moms say about my dad. He wouldn't abandon me here.”

“How do you know?” Morgan’s head tilted to the side and he reached down to pet at Applesauce who was nudging at the boy’s hand.

“I-I-” Walter gave an exasperated sigh. “I just do, ok?!”

“Alright.”

“Damn it, kid,” Walter grumbled, lowering himself onto the ground that was cold and wet with melting snow, spring starting to finally show up. He lowered his head into his hands, ignoring the way the dog’s cold nose pressed against his hands, then into his arms and back as it rounded him in concern. “Why are you so difficult? Why do you ask all of these horrible questions?”

“I-I’m sorry,” Morgan stuttered out. “I didn’t mean to-”

“Shut up, kid,” Walter ordered, looking up from his hands. “Stop talking, will ya? It’s getting on my nerves.”

He watched as the kid gave a small nod, but didn’t at all seem hurt by the words, much to Walter’s dislike. It wasn’t fair. Someone else should have to suffer just like him. Someone needed to feel his pain, to understand. No. Not understand. Just be inflicted with it for a moment so that Walter’s head could clear. He didn’t care if no one understood. He didn’t need to be seen, had never been seen by anyone other than Will.

Will had been gentle with his sight, seeming just as uncomfortable about it as Walter had been. But that’s not what Walter wanted. Not right now, maybe not ever again. He didn’t want to have eyes on him. He just wanted people to feel what was inflicting his body and mind.

After what felt like a thousand years of watching, through fingers, the boy playing fetch with the dog, Walter found the silence smothering and he couldn’t take it anymore. Getting what he wanted had never left such a bitter taste in his mouth.

“Why are you so quiet, kid?” Walter grumbled out.

Morgan didn’t turn to face him, just threw the ball once more with a weak arm. Will had taught Walter to throw and it occurred to him that this kid had never had the same existence. No father to teach him fatherly things. Nothing to do with fishing, fixing cars, or sports. No one to watch baseball with. No one to rake leaves with. No one to get secret ice cream with and not tell mom about it.

“You told me to be quiet,” Morgan said with a shrug, giving a giggle when Applesauce raced into him, knocking him back and to the ground before dropping the ball into the kid’s lap and then licking at the child’s face.

“You don’t have to do everything you’re told, you know.” Walter gave a small huff of air, pushing his hair from his face. “You throw like a girl.” That got Morgan to turn around with raised eyebrows as if he had never heard the term before.

“And that’s bad?” he asked, pushing himself up onto his knees with the ball held tightly in his hand. Walter gave a nod. “I am smaller than you, Wally. And there’s nothing wrong with a girl being good at sports.”

“I wasn’t saying you were good.”

“I inferred as much.” He didn’t seem to take the insult to heart, but he simply threw the ball once more, disregarding Walter completely.

“I’m sorry,” Walter finally said, calling Morgan’s shockingly blue eyes to his face. “I really didn’t mean to snap at you. I just...”

“It’s ok,” Morgan assured, voice light in a laugh as the dog returned and nuzzled into the boy’s chest. “You’re going through something hard at the moment. I’m not here to judge if that makes you upset or not. Your emotions are yours to feel and own.”

Myliu tave, kvailas berniukas. Eik pasirūpink savimi: I love you, stupid boy. Go take care of yourself.

Brangus berniuk: Dear boy.

Pabučiuok mane prieš išvykdamas: Kiss me before you leave.

Chapter End Notes

So, MOD is filling out paper work, I'm dealing with giving medics, police and security coworker's info and whatnot was going on. People still yelling at the gate to be let in. The bank problem feel like 3 days ago now. No cleaning done. 12 giant boxes of shipment to get out on the floor before head honchos show up.
MOD is a dear and decides to open the store back up even though we could have closed it the rest of the day. But that she wants like an hour to chill out and calm down and finish paper work. We both suffer from super high anxiety and depression and all sorts of whatnot, mixed with stress and adrenaline. We're both tired and shaking and ready to go home.
One lady during this whole thing is just being a pain. She's been there for over an hour since this started and keeps coming to the gate to yell at us, telling us about how she had to drive all the way from this other city that is legit like 10 minutes away from our store (she says it's an hour away) and how she has a foot condition that won't let her stand for long periods of time. Lady, you're in a mall, there are benches everywhere and a food court. Go sit sown.
Finally she left and then we kept getting phone calls asking when the store will be open, which is fine. You know, we can answer that, that's fine, even though there's a giant super big sign on the door saying that we'll be open in like 2 hours!
Same lady ended up calling and yelled at my MOD through the phone and was telling my MOD that she was a piece of shit and had shitty customer service and my MOD said the greatest thing ever. She said, and I'll leave the store's names out, I quote: "I don't care about my customer service, especially when I am more concerned over an employee having multiple seizures and needing to be taken to the hospital. This store is open, that store is open. You can go to one of them. Have a good day." And hung up. Both stores are legit like 10 minutes from

ours too. Not a long drive.

Waited for the closing shift people to show up before we opened the store again and then I had a meeting for my other job right after that, so that was fun. And then the next day I had an early shift to get all of that shipment out and on the floor and today is the day the head people are showing up. So I need to get dressed for that. Gonna curl my hair, which is a once in a blue moon thing. XD.

MY COWORKER IS OK! She is stable, stayed over night in the hospital and will be coming back to work next week. So, very happy about that!

People keep calling me a hero, but I'm not really.... I don't feel like it. I'm just lucky I grew up in a small hick town where the Four H Clover Farm people went around and certified everyone in how to call 911 and do CPR. Mostly just shaken up about it and happy that she's doing alright.

And you don't even want me to start on my neighbor that plays the bass at night. Started at 10-now. Called cops multiple times during the night. Roommate when and yelled at him at like 7 am and then the guy turned the music up louder. Currently other people yelling at the man outside of my window. Fun. So hope that get's figured out soon.

Anyways. I hope you all enjoyed the chapter. Please leave a kudos or comment if you enjoyed the chapter. And I hope you liked the character I introduced. I know it doesn't seem like it right now, but he is important to very very future plot. Muhahahha. Love you all. Hope you have a good rest of your week!

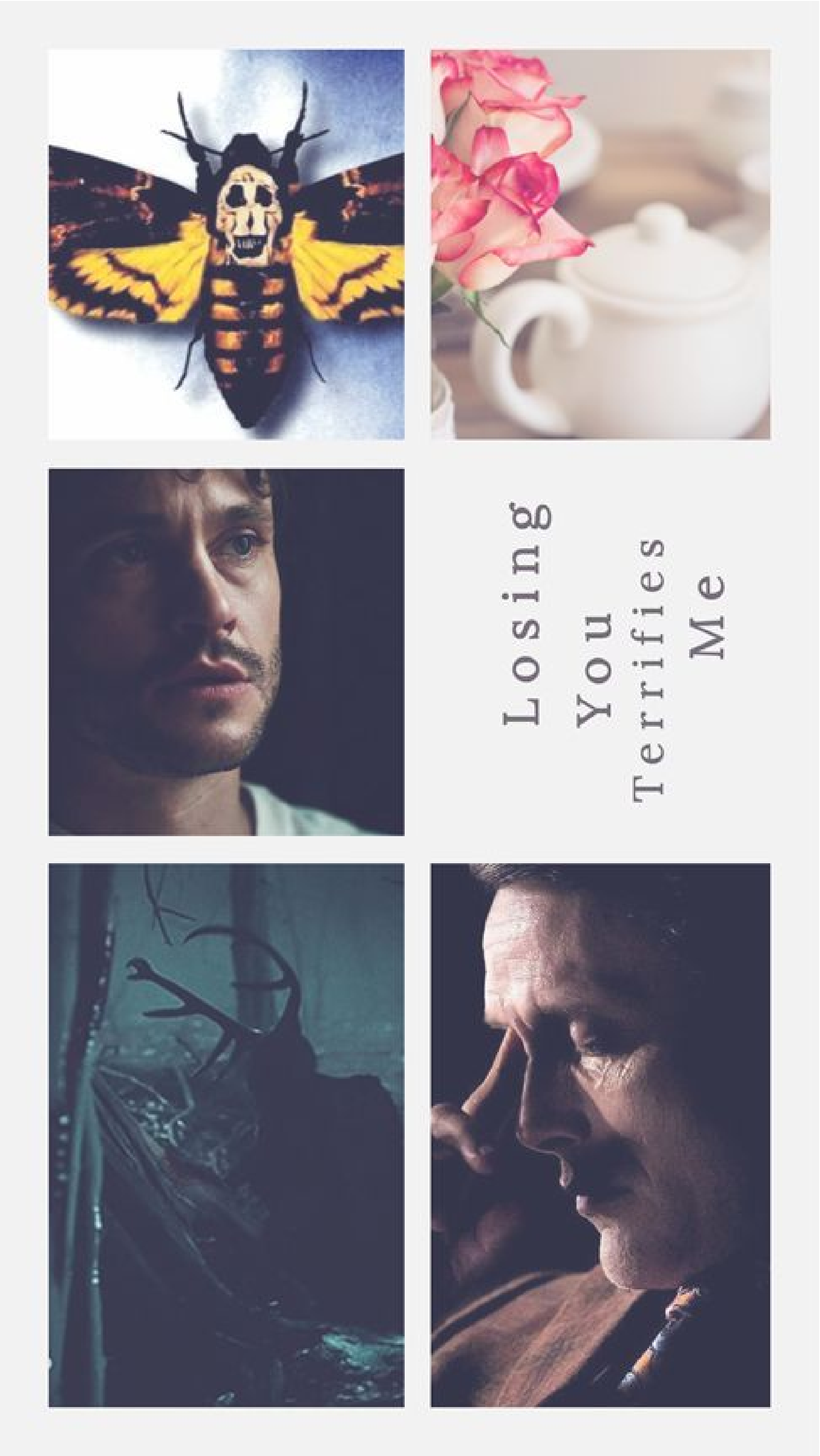
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

> “You promised to teach me chess. You promised you would show me how to sound out big words so I could read books like you. You promised to have tea parties with me in the gardens. You promised, you promised, you promised.”

Chapter Notes

> Here's the song mentioned in this chapter: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3nxOF8wnMk&ab_channel=TorontoSymphonyOrchestra
>
> It beautiful. I hope you enjoy it!



Encephalitis. That's what had caused the heat in Will's head and the sweating that soaked his skin, though he wasn't exactly certain how he knew that's what the problem was.

And the name on his lips was a strange name. Something from a faraway place that Will had never been. But no, that wasn't quite right, was it? Will had been there before. Had stepped through a *personal graveyard and looked over a looming castle on the cliff side.*

The fever pulled the name from his mouth in heated syllables. He called that name until the fever broke. Until the heat disappeared, leaving him in a cold sweat, shivering in the winter night air that surrounded his bed.

He pushed himself from the bed, legs weak. He was back in Wolf Trap. Back on his farm and he prayed that his mind continued to stay good to him, didn't let him slip back into the agitated heat that had finally released his body.

All of the windows and doors were wide open, letting the crisp air circle around the living room that Will had made his bedroom. The moon still hung through the open window, but the night was so black that it sounded like it was humming.

An awful noise filled the air, shaking the house. A scream in the woods somewhere. It was a woman's voice. One that Will felt like he recognized, but he couldn't quite place. Something nearly inhuman about it.

Will's feet moved without thought, rushing him out and into the night, bare feet running through the snow. The coldness swiftly turned into a burn, heat under his feet that were turning red. His lungs ached from the chill in the air as he followed the sound through trees with sharp branches, hands empty.

Will came to a stop in the snow at a small creature, crying. Will's breath swirled away into the humming void that no longer had the moon to light it. Will stepped closer, finding a fox curled up under a tree, fur red, but for different reasons.

The animal shook, afraid. When it caught sight of Will, the fox fell silent and Will didn't utter a word, unsure if it would make a sound out here in the woods all alone. Will glanced over the creature, finding its back leg broken, bone glittering white from the quickly returning moonlight. Will knelt down, hands digging in the snow until he found a large stone with trembling hands, raising it above his head. He would end the fox's pain.

Will's hands stilled. What had caused the wound? The closer Will looked, the more the markings were familiar to him. How large were the teeth that had done this? How powerful was the jaw? Something mechanical. Will wasn't sure how he knew, but he knew. That was the hum in the night. Hydraulics sounding through the trees.

Will could feel them now. Eyes watching him. But they came from every angle. Eyes that were obsidian, somehow darker than the night that was once again missing the moon. Will's heart thudded in his chest as he got back to his feet, following each set of eyes the best that he could.

A whisper blew through the unearthly trees on a frostbitten wind, words in a voice he knew well.

When the fox hears the rabbit scream, he comes running. But not to help.

Will froze. Not only was the fox near death, but whatever attacked it, didn't kill it. Whatever attacked the thing was killing for fun, and the torture of it was practically a game now.

The creature lunged and Will turned to run, trying to save a life he knew he didn't have. He felt like a deer trying to outrun a gun, only a bullet wouldn't be what snatched him. What would catch him would be long claws and sharp cheekbones and tangled antlers.

The pain was brilliant and smoky, claws ripping through his abdomen, spilling blood onto the white snow, staining the crystals dark. Will clutched at his life with shaking hands, wishing it would keep.

"My dearest love," the humanoid creature said in a tone similar to the whispers in the wind. "I'm not done yet. There are still years left for you to bear ."

Will gasped with a shout, sitting up in the dark, struggling to free himself from the straitjacket of sheets and blankets that surrounded him. His arms shook so badly that his hands wouldn't work. Pain ripped at his scar, something phantom but so very real, the knife cutting into him once more.

He was frantic, only seeming to trap himself further in the sticky spider's web. Obsidian claws snatched at him and a cry tore from his chest as thin and bony arms restricted his movements. He fought against them. Fought like hell.

"Will."

The word didn't make sense. It was another language in his ear. Something alien.

The claws of one hand tangled into his curls, the other held firmly to his chest, keeping him in place as if he were cemented to the bed. Panic didn't ebb, it flowed freely and he struggled to get free.

"Will." Claws ran through sweat damp curls. "Will, breathe." The other arm circled his chest firmly, keeping his lurching body trapped. "Will, breathe with me."

Hannibal. The realization struck Will forcefully and he felt the fight crumble, body weak, feeling as if he could cry, though his heart did nothing to calm its beating and his chest rose and fell in hyperventilation as fox's screams rattled through his head.

"Match your breathing to mine, Will," Hannibal instructed gently. Will could feel the doctor's chest press into his back as the arm around his chest dragged him into it. "Focus."

A slow inhale was pressed into Will's spine and he gasped, pulling air into his lungs far too quickly, the oxygen burning. The terror kept his breathing too full and too fast, painful. Hannibal's hand found his sternum, pushing into it to guide Will's exhale.

They sat in the dark, rolling in and out of inhales and exhales as one until the hysteria slowly withdrew from Will's bones, leaving his skin cold and body shaking and frail. Hannibal's hands didn't move and Will was grateful for the grounding hold as he let his body collapse into Hannibal's chest. Hannibal rocked him gently and Will's eyes slid closed, head falling back onto Hannibal's shoulder.

"Good," Hannibal whispered intimately in Will's ear. Something soft and comforting as fingers brushed through his curls, other hand still firm on Will's chest. "Good, Will. Keep breathing with me." A kiss was pressed into his cheek and Will could feel a heat start to blossom at the touch, warming his frozen skin. "I've got you, silly boy. You're safe." Will couldn't hold back a small sob as tears stung the corners of his eyes, hot with exhaustion. He hadn't been asleep long. Hannibal's alarm hadn't gone off for his next dose yet. "Hush," Hannibal shushed softly, grounding hold tightening on Will. "It's alright. Nothing is going to hurt you while I'm here Will."

Will shook his head with a deep inhale that broke the pattern that Hannibal had set and Will could feel Hannibal's hand at his chest start working once more, adding pressure to aid in his exhale.

"Focus Will. Stay with me," Hannibal instructed, lips skimming over Will's ear, whether on purpose or on accident, Will couldn't be sure. "Breathe with me."

Will licked at his lips as hot tears rolled down his cheeks. "I'm so tired, Hannibal," Will gasped out, chest jumping with another sob. "I just want to sleep."

"You can sleep, Will. I won't let anything touch you," Hannibal's voice was reassuring in Will's ear.

"They won't leave my head." Will tried to pull from Hannibal with a stifled whine, but Hannibal kept Will pinned with surprisingly strong arms. "They keep trying to pull me from you."

"Quiet your mind Will. You don't have to listen to their voices. You can block them out. Be in this moment. Right here, right now with me."

"My name is Will Graham. It is a Saturday and I am in bed with my very alive Hannibal Lecter." Will's head fell forward with a cry, but fingers in his curls pulled him back and massaged at his scalp. "My name is Will Graham," Will repeated softly, trying to place his focus on Hannibal's heat, Hannibal's fingers and hands, Hannibal's breathing. His breathing. His heart was still beating. "It is a Saturday and I am in bed with my very alive-very- v-v-very alive Hannibal Lecter." Will did his best to stop his words and breath from stuttering. "You're alive." It was a fact that Will clung to for dear life. "You're alive, Hannibal."

"Yes," Hannibal agreed softly. "I'm alive. I'm here with you. You are safe."

"My name is Will Graham and I am safe." Will took one last staggering breath and finally found Hannibal's rhythm once more. "I'm safe."

"So very safe," Hannibal assured, the words imprinting into Will's mind as sleep pulled dangerously at him.

"I want to sleep, Hannibal." Will's words were weak. "I just want to sleep."

"I'll protect you, my love." Hannibal continued his gentle rocking of Will and Will sank further into the hold, feeling like he was on one of his boats, the ocean waves gently lulling him into his exhaustion. He gave a stifled yawn. "Go to sleep."

"I don't want the voices there."

"They won't be there. I promise."

"Don't let me go." There was another yawn from Will and Hannibal could feel the empath's body slowly becoming heavier. "Don't-"

"I won't." Hannibal placed a whisper light kiss to Will's temple. Will's head tilted to the side on Hannibal's shoulder and Hannibal's hand left Will's chest to gently wipe away the tears on the boy's cheeks as he kissed Will's forehead. "Sleep, darling boy." Will's eyes flickered closed and Hannibal could feel Will's breathing slow until Will was once more asleep.

Hannibal rested his head back against the headboard with a deep exhale, still keeping his hold on Will as strong as he could as weakness plagued his muscles. Heat burned his lungs, his body racked with chills that he desperately tried to push aside

The medicine had lessened the pain and the fever, but not enough to let Hannibal rest comfortably. And his mind wouldn't let him rest, even if he begged it to. There was a rage inside that he couldn't seem to put out. Something against the man in his arms. Something against the man letting someone into their world.

Not that Will had done necessarily anything wrong. Quite the contrary, Will had done what needed to be done. Had found someone to help when Hannibal wasn't completely mentally there, falling in and out of sleep like a teen girl falling in and out of love.

Hannibal just couldn't seem to get past the idea that someone other than a person he had picked out saw him this way. This weak. This pathetic. This human. He hated it. Wished he could have had a say in it. He knew he didn't. He never did.

Hannibal sighed. Truly, there was no debasement greater than love. If only Alana or Frederick could see him now, they would finally see what it meant to best Hannibal Lecter. To win in Hannibal Lecter's little games. To cage the beast and hold the key.

Another kiss was placed to Will's brow and Hannibal's hands stroked through the boy's curls as the empath slept, nothing of whatever was plaguing him left on his features. Will's face was calm and peaceful as if the events of the last few minutes had never happened.

What had the voice been saying that had been so bad? How many voices were trying to keep the empath's attention? Hannibal knew that there were at least three active voices that would be clawing at him for acknowledgement. Jack had been one of them. Molly and Walter would be the others. And Will had mentioned there being two other names. Those voices didn't seem to bother Will quite as much, but if they were constant then Hannibal was certain that even Will would tire of Abigail and Beverly's presences.

"Hanni?" a small voice asked from somewhere in the room. A voice that had been calling to Hannibal for the last several hours. A voice he nearly felt guilty in hearing, one that he wasn't seeking out. A voice to a person who was trying to pull him away from Will. Not that she was doing it on purpose, not at all. The child would never wish him any sort of harm, she was just lonely. "Hanni, you're so old now."

Hannibal gave a small huff of laughter that turned into a small cough. He winced as it stirred Will, but not enough to fully wake him. He glanced down at the young blonde girl who sat at the edge of the bed, no older than Morgan, a fevered hallucination with a beautiful red ribbon in her hair. Hannibal's favorite color gleaming in the lamp light.

"You've gone grey," she pushed in Lithuanian. "Like papa."

"We haven't spoken in a long while," Hannibal agreed softly, doing his best not to wake the man in his arms. "I'm sorry, Mischa. What a horrible older brother I've been to you as of late."

"This is the man that kept taking you from me," Mischa said, her eyes shining even in the dark of the room. "He kept pulling you away from me. You were meant to come with me Hanni. I miss you."

Hannibal gave a sad sort of smile, stomach churning as shivers ran through his body. His eyes were hot and burned, wanting nothing more than to close and let sleep wash over him. He forced his eyes to stay open and his grip tightened, despite angry muscles, around Will protectively.

“I miss you too, Mischa,” Hannibal assured in barely more than a whisper, fire licking through his limbs, embers hot with every forced exhale. “Do not be upset with him though. He’s a good man.”

“You like him, don’t you Hanni?” Mischa rose onto her knees, bouncing slightly on the bed, but Hannibal couldn’t find the fight in him to scold the child.

“Very much,” Hannibal replied, head falling back against the headboard, neck unable to support him anymore. His ribs ached in something that was rich, hearty, and slightly crunchy. Similar to getting a hand mashed in a revolving door. Scorching.

“He’s asleep. You can come with me now, if you want. We can play again. You can teach me how to play chess.” Mischa gave me a small frown. “You never did teach me.”

“I’m sorry I never taught you. I will someday. I promise.” Hannibal licked at his dry lips and reached out for the glass of water at his bedside.

“Hanni, come with me,” Mischa begged in a whiny voice, the way all children did. Hannibal took a swallow of water, but it did nothing to stop the blaze in his body. A blaze inside and a frigid wasteland outside. His body trembled with cold, his body stealing his own heat to keep the fire alive. “Please come with me! We can explore our home again. We never got to find that secret room that papa told us about. And I miss the gardens.”

“I’ve kept you far away from there, haven’t I?” Hannibal asked as he took another shaky drink of water, the other hand still tangled deeply in Will’s curls. “I will visit your grave soon. Once more before I die.”

“No, now,” Mischa said forcefully. She hopped off the bed and raced to Hannibal’s side, taking his hand. The glass of water was ripped from his hand and shattered on the floor. “Hanni, now.” There was a tug on his hand and Hannibal could feel the man beside him stir.

“I can’t leave Will, Mischa. Not yet,” Hannibal said, his body consumed by flames now. He closed his eyes, smelling the bitter acidicness of panic in the air.

“You promised to teach me chess. You promised you would show me how to sound out big words so I could read books like you. You promised to have tea parties with me in the gardens. You promised, you promised, you promised.”

He was being separated. Pulled in two different directions. A small hand on his that was dragging him through a forest that had snow clinging to empty branches of old trees. The other hand clutched tightly to his shirt, begging him to stay in bed, pleading now to leave.

Mischa’s grip was far too tight on him and he found himself wandering through the trees and snow, the fever not nearly as present the further into the forest he went. And he looked back to find his body in a bed, slumped over with illness, a frantic Will pacing the room with a phone to his ear.

“I-I don’t know,” Will’s voice called out to him as the image got further and further away. “The alarm didn’t go off. Or he might have turned it off.”

Had he? He couldn't recall hearing an alarm signaling his next round of medication, but he supposed it didn't matter much now anyways. Not when his home greeted him from the edge of the trees and Will's shape, warm from the lamplight, had all but faded away into the darkness of large trees.

Winter faded and Hannibal found himself in the gardens of his home. There was a vast array of colorful flowers that his mother had picked out, far too many for Hannibal to try to name them all. But they made the air sweet, something to mix with the scent of sun.

In a clearing, at a rot iron table sat Mischa in her light blue dress, the one that Mother had gotten her for Easter. And that red ribbon, the one that Hannibal had given her for her birthday one year, was tied into her blonde locks. Her smile was bright as she caught sight of her brother.

"Hanni, you're in time for tea," she said excitedly, feet swinging in the chair, unable to reach the ground. Hannibal slowly glanced around, the spring air an odd warmth against his chilled skin. The castle that he had always found gloomy, mostly due to the large amounts of rain that normally fell, was bright and fairytale like behind them. Hannibal slowly found himself moving towards the table, sitting down on his sister's right hand side. "Do you want to pour the tea, or shall I?"

Hannibal blinked, the words not coming to him to say. He wanted to say no. He wanted to go back to that wintery forest and find that curly haired man in that bedroom, the man with a name that escaped him, but Hannibal knew he was important.

Hannibal's hands moved of their own accord, reaching out to the delicate white tea set in front of him. He picked up the teapot and carefully poured Mischa a cup and then himself before he picked up the small cream pitcher.

"Hannibal," a distant voice called. Something kind and gentle. Hannibal's hands paused and he glanced around the garden, finding it buzzing with life. Death's-head hawk moths fluttered between the flowers, adding their yellow to the multitude of colors that were already there, something so beautiful in the way they fluttered about, wanting so desperately to be butterflies. But the sinister skull on their bodies would never allow them to be, never let them hide away. They would always be death's omen, never something cheerfully light. "Hannibal, you need to wake up."

"Hanni, cream and sugar please," Mischa's tiny voice instructed. Hannibal inhaled deeply, shaking his head to rid himself of the voice. He poured each of them some cream and then two cubes of sugar for the young girl and one for him.

"Dr. Lecter, you need to wake up."

Hannibal's hands paused once more at a new voice and his hand went to his head with a wince. His breath was hot and his muscles ached, but he couldn't place why.

"The tea will make you feel better," Mischa said with a small laugh. "Mom always says she feels better after a cup of hot tea."

"Wake up."

"Hanni?" Mischa asked in concern, head tipped to the side as she looked over her older, much older, brother. "Are you alright?" Hannibal gave a small nod and reached out for his teacup, the porcelain cold against his burning skin. There was a sharp pain in his arm that made him wince as he lifted the teacup to his mouth. “You can see mom and papa again, too, you know. They miss you as well. Not as much as I do, though.” Mischa gave another small laugh.

“Hannibal!”

The voice stopped the teacup right before Hannibal had a chance to taste the warmth of the liquid on his lips. He looked up towards the voice and found a man wandering the gardens, nearly swallowed by the flowers and moths. Not very tall, in dress pants and a god awful dark green flannel. His hair was a halo of curls, brown with hints of red on the spring sun. Eyes...

Such .

“Hannibal,” he called again.

A voice like Tallis Fantasia by Vaughan Williams. A clash of old and new. Something medieval as it kept the tune of Why Fum'th in Fight The Gentiles Spite while straddling 400 years of space and time to add in the majesties of orchestral respect from 1910.

“Hannibal, come home to me, please.”

To you? Hannibal wanted to ask, but the words died on his tongue, mouth sewn shut.

“Hanni, your tea is getting cold,” Mischa scolded lightly. “Drink your tea and then you can teach me to play chess like you promised.”

“Dr. Lecter. You need to wake up.” This voice didn’t have a body to go with it, but it was firm and demanding.

Wake up?

Hannibal was more than sure that he was awake. He was at his home with Mischa, drinking tea the way that she liked to do when it was finally warm enough to go outside. Beside him, Mischa didn’t pay any mind to the beautiful man in the garden who was wandering around, unseeing, nor did she show any indication that she heard the other man’s voice that was instructing Hannibal to wake up.

“Hanni, please drink your tea. I made it myself.” Mischa gave a small laugh as she reached out and took a sugar cube from the small cup that held them. She popped it into her mouth and her fingers played with the ribbon in her hair. “Well, mom helped.”

Hannibal gave another absent nod, once more looking down at his cup and lifting it to his lips. The porcelain touched his skin, but he stopped as a moth landed on the rim opposite his face, wings outheld as if trying to become the design on the teacup. Something to cover his lips, keep him silent. The thread to his sewn lips.

“Hannibal. Please!”

The words were desperate. A clashing of violins and flutes that weren’t following a conductor. Something that snatched at Hannibal’s attention and he rose from the table, cup still in hand, but slowly lowering to the saucer.

“No, he can’t take you back, Hanni.” Hannibal looked back down at his little sister who had tears pouring down her cheeks. “Please don’t leave me again,” she begged, wiping at her cheeks. “Please stay with me.”

“Will,” Hannibal whispered, words finally coming back to him. He wasn’t sure where the name came from, but it must have been correct, because the man paused in the garden and turned in Hannibal’s direction, though his eyes were still unseeing. “I can’t leave him.”

“Why?” Mischa demanded, getting to her knees on the chair, pushing herself up with her hands on the table. “Hanni, you are supposed to come with me.”

“I can’t,” Hannibal muttered, not pulling his eyes away from the man still searching the gardens for him.

“You can,” Mischa assured. “Drink your tea and we can go to the creek. We can go swimming. You like swimming.” A tiny hand forced the cup back up to his lips and he found himself unable to fight the movement until that man spoke once more.

“I love you, Hannibal. Please come back to me. I can’t lose you yet. You promised to show me the world, remember?” Fingers brushed back those cinnamon curls and blue eyes were scared, words choked. “You don’t break your promises, Hannibal. You have to show me the world. You have to. You fucking promised.”

Hannibal halted the teacup, hands trembling against Misha’s pleading force.

“Dr. Lecter.”

“I promise to come back, Mischa,” Hannibal whispered, slowly turning to look over the young girl who had tears staining her cheeks. The child shook her head. “I will return to you. But I can’t go yet. There are still things I need to do before I come back to you.”

“But he’s taking you away from me,” Mischa argued, once more trying to push the cup to Hannibal’s mouth, but Hannibal’s strength held firm. “It’s not fair.”

“Mischa, I thought you would be happy for me. I thought you wanted me to find someone who loved me.” Hannibal gave a small sigh with a slight smile. One hand left the cup and brushed the tears from the girl’s cheeks. “You said that you wanted me to be happy. Do you remember?” Mischa gave a small nod. “He makes me happy. So happy, Mischa.”

“What about me?”

“He likes you too. I’ve told him about you, you know.”

“You did?” The tears seemed to stop at that, the girl’s eyes curious. “You never tell anyone about me.”

“Will cares for you and he’ll come with me when I come back. We’ll all be together, and you will see,” Hannibal assured. “Please let me go back to him. He needs me.”

“I need you,” Mischa whispered with a shake of her head. “What about all of the things you promised me? You made them first.”

“I can’t do them yet. Wait until I come back.” Hannibal leaned over and placed a kiss to his sister’s head. “I will teach you to play chess and how to read big words and have tea parties with you every day. I will go swimming in the creek and push you on the swing on the hill. I will. All of it is yours for the rest of eternity, but please wait a little longer for me. Can you be patient? Please? For me?”

There was a small pause, as if the world had stopped spinning, something across Mischa's features that Hannibal couldn't read. Mischa finally gave a nod and Hannibal exhaled deeply, something smothering hot.

"Thank you Mischa." He gave her head another kind kiss and he turned to look over the man in the gardens. "Will!" he called, making the man stop, chest heaving with breath. "I love you."

The teacup fell from Hannibal's grip as he rushed to through the garden, the glass shattering as it hit the gravel.

Occasionally I drop a teacup to the floor just to see it shatter; I'm disappointed when it doesn't pick itself up and come back together. Someday, perhaps.

But he wasn't disappointed. This teacup could be shattered. He could let it be shattered. Especially if it led him right back to Will, right back where he was meant to belong. Right into Will's arms that were held open and clasped around him tightly when Hannibal finally reached them.

A loud sound woke Will. Something shattering. Something glass. He jumped upright from where he was slumped against a sweating body. He glanced around in the lamp light to see Hannibal with a hand hanging off the bed, body lax and covered once more in sweat.

Will jumped to his feet and raced around to the other side of the bed to find the glass of water in pieces on the ground. Will carefully stepped around the glass and snatched his phone from the table, looking at the time.

"Shit," he hissed, a hand going to his head. "Hannibal." Will stepped forward and gasped as something sharp sliced at his foot, the glass being the very last thing in his mind. He reached out a hand and pressed it to Hannibal's head, not even needing to touch the man to feel the heat radiating off of him. "If you fucking die on me now, I will bring you back to kill you myself."

Will stepped away from the bed, looking at the time once more. It had been nearly eight hours since Hannibal's last dose of medicine, but Will didn't feel any more rested. The panic was worse now.

He pulled up Elijah's number and stared at it for a moment. It wasn't like it was late at night. It was early evening, but he would be with his family. Maybe eating dinner. Maybe playing catch in the yard with his kids. Will couldn't bother the man. Not again. Not so soon.

This wasn't a *just like that* anymore. He would owe Elijah everything if that man came back to help. But Will was at a loss. He didn't know what to do. With a trembling hand, Will hit the number and placed the phone to his ear.

"Hello?"

"Elijah," Will breathed out at the voice that answered him. "I-I don't know what to do."

"What happened?" the man asked, tone serious on the other side of the line.

"I-I missed a few doses of medication."

"I thought you had an alarm set. Did you sleep through them?"

“I-I don’t know,” Will’s voice shook. “The alarm didn’t go off. Or he might have turned it off.” Will didn’t want to think about what that implied if Hannibal really had turned it off. Did Hannibal just want to die? Should Will just let him go? Was he that desperate? No. Hannibal promised. He promised a lot of things that still hadn’t happened yet. He promised to take care of Will and Walter. He promised to show Will the world. He promised to read Will to sleep every night when Will couldn’t sleep. He promised to marry Will.

“Everything is going to be alright Will,” Elijah assured on the phone. “I can be there in about ten minutes. What are his symptoms?”

Will glanced back over Hannibal and shook at the man’s shoulder, but he didn’t stir. The only thing Hannibal did was breathe with a wheezy sort of breath. Will bit his lips, a hand going to his head. “His fever is back. Chills, sweating. He’s barely breathing. Uh...” Will could feel his throat restrict and tears come to his eyes. No. He was not going to cry again.

“Alright. Will, get him a dose of those four medications and get another alarm set for four hours. Try to wake him up. Get some water into him. Maybe those painkillers if he can take them. They’ll help lower the fever.”

“Alright,” Will whispered with a small nod even if Elijah couldn’t see him.

“I’m in the car now. I will be there soon.”

“Thank you.” Will lowered the phone and went about gathering what he had been instructed to gather, tacky footprints being left behind him with every other step. Will found himself in the kitchen, absently getting a new glass of water to take back into the room, focus deep set on a car engine that stopped outside of the house. Will waited on bated breath until there was a knock at the door and he raced to it. He flung it open to find the light haired man from earlier with that same kind look on his face saying that he only wanted to help. “Thank god,” Will whispered, moving out of the way for Elijah to enter the house, bag in hand.

“Will, you’re bleeding,” Elijah said in concern and Will finally noticed a sharp pulse in his foot.

“I don’t care.” Will shook his head. “Please help Hannibal.” Will, with cup in hand, made his way back to the master bedroom, Elijah following him, doing his best not to step in the man’s blood that covered the hall. Will pushed into the bedroom and Elijah found the cause of the injury to Will’s foot. A shattered cup lay on Hannibal’s side of the bed and Elijah wondered if maybe the man had been trying to get a drink of water when his body gave out on him. “Hannibal.” Will moved over, stepping through the mess of glass once more, uncaring, and helped straighten Hannibal up in bed. “Hannibal, you need to wake up.”

Elijah moved to the opposite side of the bed and looked over the doctor, a hand going to the man’s burning skin. “Dr. Lecter, you need to wake up,” he said firmly as he dug through his own bag. “Will, please get his medication ready. I was able to pick up a few others.”

“When?” Will asked, jumping into action as instructed. “How?” He tore open the first box and went about mixing the drugs in it before ripping open the package of a needle and filling it carefully.

“I thought there was a small possibility that he could relapse,” Elijah explained as he got to work opening the medication he had brought with himself. “Wake up,” he ordered once more, shaking at Hannibal’s shoulder with no reaction from the man. “Or I thought I would come by in the morning and check on you two. Make sure everything was going alright if I didn't receive a call. With sepsis, one really should be taking more than the four antibiotics. Six to eight is more appropriate."

Will frowned as he inserted the needle into Hannibal's arm. Elijah watched as the man's brow creased with pain and dislike. Maybe he wasn't too far gone. "He didn't tell me that."

"Don't be cross with him over that. It's difficult enough to remember the names of these drugs when you aren't being eaten alive by fever." Elijah tried to make light of the situation, but it did nothing to erase the frown from Will's face. "I'm sure he would have told you." Elijah pressed his own needle into Hannibal's other arm. "Once you're done with those, try to wake him up. We need to get fluids and those painkillers in him."

Will gave a determined nod and did just as told. Once the four medications were administered, he brushed Hannibal's hair from his face, voice ragged in a plea. "Hannibal!" He took Hannibal's face in his hands and turned the man to look at him. Eyes flickered open and Will nearly choked on the man's name once more. "Hannibal." Just as quickly as they had opened, Hannibal's eyes slid shut once more and Will's eyes closed. "Hannibal, come home to me, please."

"Dr. Lecter. You need to wake up," Elijah tried once more as he got another syringe filled with another antibiotic. He reached out to Hannibal's arm and let the needle find its mark.

Will reached out to the glass of water on the bedside table and took Hannibal's chin firmly in his grip. "Hannibal, I need you to drink this. I know you can hear me." He pressed the glass to Hannibal's lips and tipped it to let the icy water brush over Hannibal's lips. He didn't drink it though. "Hannibal. Please!"

That seemed to be enough to gain the man's attention. Enough to bring consciousness to Hannibal so that he could drink the water Will was providing him. It was slow work and Will found his hand lowering down to Hannibal's neck, softly stroking there to coax Hannibal to swallow more water. When the glass was nearly empty, Will set it aside with a small breath of relief.

"Will," Hannibal whispered. Though the word was there, there was no awareness to it, something said in motor skill. A practiced name through practiced lips.

"Hannibal, I need you to wake up. Please take these pills. Please." Will dumped three of them into his hand and grabbed the glass once more, but Hannibal was gone again, the water running down his chin when Will tried to have him drink more.

"Smash up the pills, put them in the water," Elijah instructed, setting aside the last needle wrapper. Will watched him for a moment as he filled the clear tube with clear liquid to a particular line. "Will."

Elijah's tone was forceful and made Will jump from the bed and race to the kitchen. The pills were placed on the counter and Will found a spoon, using his full body weight to turn the pills to a white dust. He grabbed a new glass and scooped the powder into it, filling it with a bit of the mint tea that had been left over and was rather cold now, but if it had been good enough for Hannibal earlier, then it would be fine now. It would also help with the bitter taste that would come from the pills.

Will made his way back to the bedroom to find that Elijah had cleaned up everything and had returned to his seat on Will's side of the bed, gently dabbing a wet cloth over Hannibal's face to clean at the sweat that was there.

Will sat back on the side of the bed, the blood now cold and sticky between his toes, but he pushed the thought aside as he took Hannibal's face once more in his hand, guiding the cup to Hannibal's lips. Hannibal didn't wake though. Just continued in his shallow, wheezy breaths. Will felt something snap in his chest, something so incredibly painful.

"I love you Hannibal," he whispered, leaning over to kiss lips that let excruciatingly hot breath pass through them. "Please come back to me. I can't lose you yet." Will gave a teary smile. "You promised to show me the world, remember?" Eyes barely opened and Will ran a hand through his hair as a spark of hope went off in his heart, next words choked. "You don't break your promises, Hannibal. You have to show me the world. You have to." It was said firmly, making sure that Hannibal understood what was expected of him. "You fucking promised."

"Dr. Lecter," Elijah called, reaching out and checking the man's pulse.

"Will," Hannibal's weak voice called out once more, still just as distant as the first time, but it was enough for Will.

"Please drink this, Hannibal," Will whispered, placing the cup back to Hannibal's lips that parted without being forced. Will tipped the glass and Elijah held Hannibal's head steady. Will's fingers found Hannibal's throat, running up and down it once more, trying to sooth and persuade Hannibal enough that he could drink. "Thank you," Will gasped out when the man did just that, adam's apple bobbing with each slow swallow.

"Will, I'm staying the night with you after I look at your foot," Elijah announced. "You're going to sleep and I will make sure Hannibal gets his medicine. You'll be adding four more medications to his rounds. They'll help."

"You-Y-You don't have to stay," Will said with a shake of his head, though his eyes stayed trained firmly on Hannibal who was still obediently drinking whatever Will gave him to drink. "I don't want to make you feel like-"

"You're very kind, Will," Elijah assured, once more cleaning at Hannibal's skin. "But my family understands and I would much rather be here if something goes wrong instead of you having to call me at god's hour to come racing back over here."

With the glass now empty, Will placed it aside and leaned over, head pressed to Hannibal's shoulder. "Thank you, Hannibal. Thank you," he whispered, pressing a kiss into the man's heart through the damp t-shirt he wore. Will sat up and turned to Elijah, holding out his hand. "Can I see your phone?"

Elijah gave an odd look, but stopped his work and pulled his phone from his pocket, handing it to the Ex-FBI agent. Will took it and dug through it for a moment, before typing something on the screen and handing it back to Elijah who found a new contact saved to his phone.

"That is Hannibal's very personal number," Will explained, though he wasn't exactly sure where he was pulling the information. But it sounded right, felt true. Maybe a long forgotten memory. He seemed to still have a lot of those missing and the pain that was settling into his skull told him that it was probably just that. "He checks messages every Thursday. He won't call back. He never does, but..." Will licked his lips. "If you ever need something, anything at all, call that number."

"You're giving this to me because...?" Elijah asked softly, looking over the random digits that were there and wondering if it was the truth.

“We owe you his life.” Will licked at his lips with a deep breath. “Twice now you’ve helped us and have wanted nothing. Anything you could possibly need, call that number. But remember that he only checks the messages once a week.”

Elijah wasn’t exactly sure how to answer that. He wasn’t exactly sure when he would need a favor large enough to call upon the killer and his murder husband, as Tattlecrimes had called them, which wasn’t a that far off description. He nodded his thanks all the same and slid his phone back into his pocket.

“Let’s take a look at your foot Will.”

It took a bit of time for the glass to be collected from Will’s foot, but with it cleaned and bandaged, Will was told to go back to his side of the bed. Elijah dug through his bag until he found the pill bottle he wanted and let a single pill fall into the palm of his hand. With the nearly finished glass of water in hand, he held the pill out to Will, who looked at it apprehensively. Elijah couldn’t help but be curious if maybe Hannibal had done something akin to drugging Will before, enough so that Will was fairly cautious with any pill that was placed before him.

“This is Triazolam,” Elijah explained. “It’s a sleeping pill. A good one. It will help.” Will shook his head, a worried expression over his face as he looked down at Hannibal who was still wheezing. “I will be here Will. He will be fine. I won’t let anything happen to him, to either of you.” With small, nearly regretful movements, Will took the items and swallowed down the pill. “I will clean this up.” Elijah glanced around at all the blood that still covered the floors and went out the door into the rest of the house. “You sleep.”

“I can help-”

“It shouldn’t take more than ten or fifteen minutes for you to be asleep,” Elijah said with a gentle smile. “Please. Rest.”

Will gave a small nod and rested back in the bed and Elijah watched as the man curled carefully into Hannibal’s side, almost as if he didn’t want to touch Hannibal, afraid the doctor might shatter.

Will listened to Hannibal’s noisy breath, the drugs slowly allowing a calming haze to blanket his mind and his body and he swore he could hear Hannibal’s voice as he drifted off.

“Will, I love you.”

Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

> “You’re going to let them take me,” he finally settled on. “They’re both killers. You think it’s safe to leave a little kid in the hands of the likes of those two?”

Chapter Notes

> An early update for you guys because I am going to be at the lake for the next four days and want nothing to do with anything from the outside world. I haven't had a day off since the giant issue with my coworker and I absolutely think some R&R and some TLC are deserved and needed before my head short circuits. Hope you enjoy it!

Losing
You
Terrifies
Me

“What happened that night, Jack?” a voice asked from the doorway to his office. Jack didn’t bother looking up. He didn’t need to, to know which doctor darkened his doorway this time. “It’s been nearly a week and the kid won’t talk to me. He stays so close to Morgan that Morgan might as well be a stuffed teddy bear.”

“How is Morgan doing?” Jack asked softly.

“Better. Has checkups once a week for the time being to make sure his mental state is stable enough. What happened to Walter, Jack? What did you do?”

“I should have guessed the boy would be with you,” Jack muttered, finally raising his head from the file on his desk to find Alana leaning in his doorway. The woman somehow looked stronger with her firm expression and pantsuit that she had taken to wearing after their fateful night in Hannibal’s kitchen. Her arms were crossed and her lipstick a bright and frightful red that seemed to pull her look of distaste together. She pushed herself from the doorway and closed the door behind her, before coming to stand by his desk. “Have they made contact?”

“They’re not stupid Jack,” Alana grumbled, arms once more folded over her chest. “Of course they haven’t reached back out.”

“What are you going to do with the kid?” Jack gave a sigh, rubbing at his chin that scratched against his fingers with the need to be shaved that he had been ignoring. “We can let the state collect him.”

“No,” Alana said sternly. “You are not going to let him be shoved into the system. He does not deserve that after what you did to him.”

Jack frowned. “What I did to him,” Jack pondered, making it sound nearly like a question.

“I know you were what happened, Jack. I'm not believing the news. I’m not thick.”

“Did the boy tell you?”

“He mentioned it in passing. He doesn’t seem to like me much.” Alana gave a sharp sigh and took a seat in the chair across from Jack’s desk. “Do you have any lead on them? Any ideas where they are at all?”

“I know they’re in Vermont,” Jack answered, rubbing at his tired eyes. He hadn’t slept nearly the whole week, unable to get his guilt to be bitten back. “I don’t have anything else. They’re too careful and even with how small Vermont is, that doesn’t mean I can go knocking door to door until I find them.”

“Do they know that the two of them are in Vermont?” Alana questioned, a hand giving a flurry around the room and Jack took that to mean the FBI.

“No,” Jack answered softy, leaning back in his chair. “I gave them the story that Hannibal wanted.”

“And what exactly was that?”

“They didn’t tell you?” Jack asked back, head tipped to the side in question.

“They did not. Said that they needed someone to watch the boy and they would come back for him when the time permitted. So far...” Alana gave a loud exhale. “Time has not been very permitting.”

“And you just took the boy?”

“I do not find the idea of owing Dr. Hannibal Lecter anything pleasing in any sense of the word. I do not need him to come and collect.” Alana picked at some fuzz at the knee of her pants before her eyes met Jack’s for the first time in the conversation. “I take it that you do owe Dr. Lecter something for using his story?”

“We will see if he comes to collect.” Jack gave a small nod. “He claimed Molly as his own kill and kidnapped Will and Walter. He’s hiding them and everyone is searching for them. But since the 48 hours have come and gone, no one has much hope of finding them alive anymore.”

Alana seemed to straighten at this. “They don’t?” Jack gave a curious look at the hopeful tint to her voice. “The Ripper kept Miriam Lass alive for two years. They think that he would kill them off that quickly? No bodies have been recovered, nothing horrifically displayed. Not to mention, the world over knows of the doctor’s obsession with Special Agent Will Graham. He wouldn’t kill Will.”

“Are you sure?” Jack asked in honest curiosity, wanting to know where Alana was basing her assurance.

Alana gave a firm nod. “He’s promised before not to let any harm come to Will. He doesn’t take broken promises lightly.”

“That’s not good enough for you though,” Jack observed aloud, leaning forward in his chair, arms folded on the desk. “What convinced you?”

“Have you seen them around each other? The way Hannibal acts around Will?”

“I didn’t notice much more than the kitchen knife that was coming at me,” Jack grumbled, thinking back on that night in the kitchen, waving his bandaged hand at Alana. “And the way Hannibal acts around Will? You mean the way he’s always acted around Will?”

Alana shook her head slowly. “Are you that blind?” she asked incredulously and Jack frowned at the accusation. “Hannibal has done everything in his power to make sure that Will has no one else but him and Will is very content to allow Hannibal to manipulate the world around him so that becomes his truth. They, despite how utterly sick and twisted it is, love each other. They have for years and have just never been able to admit it to each other before. They tried before we were all left for dead. Randall Tier and Freddie Lounds were their silent confessions.”

“I was trying not to see it,” Jack muttered out, hand covering his mouth. “Trying to believe that Will knew better. Could see clearer.”

“He can see just fine now,” Alana said with a small shrug. “And Hannibal Lecter is the one who helped him see, who opened that door. And Will walked through that door. It might not be the outcome that any of us wanted for him, but all of us saw it and kept pushing him towards it just so we could put Hannibal behind bars.”

Jack scoffed out, breath harsh through his nose.

“You’re never going to catch him Jack. He’ll never be back behind bars unless Will rejects him again. And Will is done rejecting, done fighting. He has let himself be swallowed by the beast to save the rest of us and I don’t think he really cares.”

“You think he did it to save us?” Jack asked, brows furrowed at the suggestion.

“Saving people is why he did everything he did for you,” Alana reminded lightly. “And maybe we can save them.”

“You want to help them?” Jack nearly roared, disbelieving of what was being told to him. Alana shot him a stern look and he huffed angrily. “I am not helping them. They have moved beyond the realm of help. And if we do help them, they will continue to kill. We might not be able to label them as psychopaths, but that doesn’t change that all killers have a need to kill. A cool down period and an urge. They will kill again.”

“Killing or not, you owe him, Jack. And you know him. He will come back to collect. Whether it's tomorrow or a hundred years from now, you will be paying your debt.” Alana got to her feet and fixed her perfectly placed curls, before turning towards the door.

There was an aggravated sigh. “What exactly did you have in mind?” Jack watched as Alana stopped and turned back to Jack who cocked his head to the side. “And since when have you and Dr. Lecter been buddy buddy?”

“It's in the name of self-preservation and the safety of my family Jack. If getting them out of here protects me, then I am for it, others be damned. No one is taking my family from me. Not you, not Will Graham and definitely not Hannibal Lecter.”

Jack gave an understanding nod, though the thoughts were bitter in his mind and on his tongue, but he held them back, instead asking once more. “What exactly did you have in mind?”

* * *

“What?” Zeller’s surprised voice asked, body frozen in its work, leaning over a body that had been shot in the face with a shotgun, nothing left to visually identify the body save for some strange tattoos that they were trying to take pictures of to try to find the artists. Zeller slowly looked up and turned to where Jack stood, arms folded over his chest, with a frown on his face, clearly not at all comfortable with what he had just suggested. “What do you mean?”

“We’re...” Price trailed off, meeting Zeller’s face. “Faking their deaths?”

“You do not have to do anything,” Jack stated with a clear voice. “I would like your help, but I understand the complications this creates by even having this *extremely hypothetical* conversation.”

“Hypothetical,” Zeller muttered with a disbelieving nod. He pulled the camera from around his neck and set it aside.

“We already took his dogs, I’m not sure how much more you want from us, Jack,” Price stated, leaving where he was at his computer to stand beside Zeller, covering Zeller’s hand with his own.

“I don’t like this anymore than you do,” Jack said. “But I really don’t have anyone else to turn to that can help fudge the facts. Alana has offered-”

“We don’t want her money, Jack,” Zeller bit out harshly. “You do understand what will happen to all of us if anyone figures this out?”

“I do,” Jack replied with a firm nod.

Zeller sighed and looked over Price for a moment with a frown. Price's face wasn’t as upset as Zeller had thought it would be and he shook his head in disbelief.

“He was our friend,” Price said in a rushed explanation. “They were both our friends.”

“No,” Zeller said, still shaking his head and pulling his hand from Price’s. “Jimmy, he killed Beverly. He killed her and ate her.”

“I know.” Price’s voice was small.

“We had to perform the autopsy on her, Jimmy.”

“I know.”

Zeller sighed and closed his eyes, head leaning back. “They will keep killing. That girl in the mall wasn’t his last. It will be nowhere near his last if we do this.”

“What made you and Alana come up with this?” Price finally asked, turning back to face Jack whose large shoulders rose and fell with each of his deep and steadying breaths. “Why on earth do you need to help him?”

“I made a mistake and Lecter took the heat for it,” Jack replied, watching the two men carefully as realization came to their features.

“Molly,” Zeller supplied out loud with a deep exhale. “And you’re worried that he’s going to...” The man trailed off and Price quickly picked up the thought.

“Hold you accountable for it.”

Jack gave a nod.

“So, this is you being selfish,” Zeller grumbled, arms folding over his chest. “I have work to do, Jack. I don’t have time for hypotheticals.” Zeller snatched back up his camera and turned away from the conversation, putting the strap over his neck once more, jaw tight.

“Beverly would have helped.” Zeller growled and raised the camera back to his eye, trying to focus in on the tattoo on the girl’s shoulder, but at a hand on his, the camera was slowly lowered. He glanced to the side to see Price with a tight lipped, sad sort of smile. “Beverly would have helped them,” Price repeated softly.

“Why do you want to help?” Zeller asked, chewing on his cheek that was feeling more raw with how often he had been doing it as of late. “Why do you want to do anything for that man?”

Price was silent for a moment, searching for the answer, glancing back at a silent Jack who still stood with arms folded, waiting for a firm reply to his proposal that was anything but hypothetical.

“Because it’s the right thing to do,” Price said, calling horrified eyes to his face. “Because this is going to protect our friends and families. Because despite all of the wrong that both of them have committed, they have done numerous good things and I think the good far outweighs the bad.”

“You’re both crazy,” Zeller hissed, palms digging into his eyes until he could see dancing shapes. “We’re going to be locked up for the rest of our lives, Jimmy.”

“I think our resources should be unlimited enough to keep us from behind bars for the foreseeable future,” Price teased back in a pained sort of voice and Zeller knew that Price was fighting his moral compass just as much as Zeller was.

“Is that a yes?” Jack asked hesitantly. He let out a deep breath at two nods.

“How do you expect to reach out to them if you have no idea where they are? They would have ditched their phones and anything else tying them to their life here,” Price said with a small shrug. “With both of them working together again, we’re never going to find them unless they want to be found.”

“We could try to use Freddie Lounds,” Zeller muttered, though he wasn’t sold on the idea. “Call out to them through an article.”

“There’s no guarantee they will read it.” Price shrugged. “And involving Freddie Lounds-”

“-is a bad idea,” Zeller agreed.

“Molly’s phone was missing from the crime scene, wasn’t it?” Jack asked curiously. “It’s possible they could have it.”

“They wouldn’t be that stupid to hold onto a phone like that,” Zeller shot back with a huff. “No way.”

“We can still try. It’s a step,” Price said with a small smile.

“Let’s give it a few more days before we go about calling. Don’t want to scare them off,” Jack said, turning away from the room.

“What happened to Walter, Jack?” Price asked quickly.

“They didn’t hurt him, did they?” Zeller pressed.

“He’s living with Alana,” Jack replied with a small smile. “He is perfectly fine. See if you can track Molly’s and Will’s phones, but don’t let anyone know.”

“Right,” both men said in determination.

“Mom?” Morgan asked as Alana stepped into the dining room where both Margot and Morgan sat, silently eating dinner. “Where were you today?” Morgan dropped down from his chair and rushed to Alana, hugging around her legs. “I missed you.”

“I missed you too,” Alana muttered, ruffling her son’s hair that probably needed a good trim. She glanced around the room once more and met Margot’s eyes with a question. “Where’s Walter?”

“He wanted to stay in his room,” Margot replied. “I thought it best not to disturb him.”

“Yeah. He said he wasn’t feeling very well,” Morgan added, pulling from Alana’s grip and going back to the table to sit beside Margot to keep eating.

“I’m going to go check on him,” Alana announced, causing Margot to look over Alana with disbelief on her face.

“They agreed?” Margot asked in shock.

“They agreed,” Alana answered with a small nod. “We have the passports and all the other paperwork in order?”

“Yes,” Margot replied, licking at her lips. “We can leave the moment the coast is clear.”

“Perfect.”

Morgan glanced between the two women with a confused look, but neither gave him much notice as Alana left the room to go find Walter’s. She knocked on the door and waited for an answer, but none came. With a small sigh, Alana pushed open the door and glanced in to find Walter fast asleep with a book in his hands, the lamp on beside him.

She slowly stepped into the room and walked over to the bed. She pulled the book carefully from his grip and set it aside on the bedside table, before reaching out to try to position the boy into something more comfortable. She frowned as the boy stirred and sat up with a yawn, rubbing at his eyes.

“What do you want?” he asked as Alana came into focus.

Alana gave a tight lipped smile and sat on the edge of the bed. “I have something that I need to tell you,” she said firmly and Walter was silent, attention on her. “We are trying to find out a way to make it so your dad can come and get you.”

“Trying?” Walter questioned, hands gripping the blanket in his lap.

“We still don’t know where they are,” Alana explained. “But when we find them, we are going to make sure that you can’t be found again. You can go with them.”

Walter was quiet, his head tipping back and forth in thought. He looked as if he were swishing water in his mouth and Alana wondered what was going through his mind, eyes flickering about the room, unable to settle on anything.

“You’re going to let them take me,” he finally settled on.

“Why would I not let your parents come and get you?” Alana questioned back.

“They’re both killers. You think it’s safe to leave a little kid in the hands of the likes of those two?” Walter challenged, not fighting against the fact that Alana had called Hannibal one of his parents as if the kid knew he didn’t have a choice.

“Are you saying that you don’t want to go back to Will?” Alana asked carefully, unsure what can of worms she had opened by telling the boy the hints of a plan.

Walter slowly shook his head. “I want to go back to my dad. I just don’t understand why you’re trying to help them.” Before Alana could reply, Walter continued. “And by *we*, am I safe to assume that you are referring to Jack Crawford?” Walter’s head tipped lazily to the side to meet Alana’s gaze and she didn’t have to say a word for the recognition to be clear on the boy’s face. “I would rather not have him anywhere near my father. The last time he shot my mother. I would hate to lose my dad too.”

Alana gave a small nod in understanding. “Regardless of what he did, and this does not discount how you feel, Jack is who we need to have help us. He’s the only one who will bend the rules for us.”

“You won’t be able to find them,” Walter shot back, a hint of irritation in his voice. “Jack Crawford was searching for them for months after Hannibal escaped. I know that they were only found because Hannibal wanted them to be. If you look at everything he’s ever done, no one can find him unless he wants them to.”

“You sound like you know a lot about Hannibal,” Alana remarked, eyebrows rose in interest. “Why did you learn Lithuanian?”

Walter gave a shrug. “I was bored.”

“Walter,” Alana said firmly, but not unkindly. She reached out and patted his knee, which Walter quickly pulled from her grip, shifting further away from her. “Please tell me why you learned to speak in the native tongue of a serial killer.”

“I told you,” Walter grumbled, looking put out. Alana tipped her head to the side, listening carefully to the boy’s words, reading into the rigidness of his body. “I knew he would be coming after us. I knew I would meet him one day. I needed something to endear myself to him, make me indispensable. That’s what dad taught me, so that’s what I did.”

“You’re a smart boy, Walter.”

Walter looked over at Alana with an agitated huff. “Are you saying that as a compliment or pointing it out so that I will take to your plan a little easier?”

Alana blinked a few times, trying to come up with an answer to supply, caught off guard by the child’s strong words. “A bit of both, I suppose,” she finally settled on. “Do you like Hannibal Lecter?”

Walter’s face scrunched up at that. “He was nice, I suppose. As nice as a killer could be.”

“Nice?” Alana prompted with a deep breath, curious if she could get the kid to finally open up a bit more.

“Other than tying me up, he didn’t hurt me or my mom.” Walter closed his eyes with a sigh, lost back in the memory. “No. He didn’t even tie me up. He didn’t so much as touch me. He looked a little... can killers feel sad?”

“Anyone has the capacity for any emotion they feel,” Alana supplied simply. “Even a killer can feel sadness, anger or love. And Hannibal has more emotions than he wants the world to see. He is just as complex, if not more so, as the rest of the world and I think he likes it that way.”

“I don’t know if he was sad exactly,” Walter muttered. “He got mad at my mom. Never raised his voice though. Just slammed his glass of wine on the table. Nothing else.”

“Wally, would you like to come have dinner with us?” Alana asked kindly, grateful for even the smallest glimpse into what this boy had gone through and not wanting to out stay her welcome.

“No.”

“Alright.” Alana gave him a warm smile and stood, receiving a confused look. She didn’t often let things slip and she was curious over how Walter noticed how easily she gave up the fight. The boy was smart, not surprising considering how brilliant Will was, but she hadn’t expected him to pick up on her so quickly, especially with how he tried to fight against her. “If you get hungry, you know where the kitchen is.”

Alana straightened her shirt and went for the door, stopping at her name. She turned back to where the boy had moved to the side of the bed. “Jack’s going to stop by tonight, isn’t he?”

“Yes,” Alana answered with a nod.

Walter gave a sigh and rubbed at his head. “I’d prefer not to run into him. Can I take dinner here?”

“I’m sorry. We’ve had to deter Morgan from eating anywhere else. He makes messes and then we get ants. It would be unfair if-”

“Yeah, I get it,” Walter grumbled out his interruption, pushing himself to the edge of the bed. “I eat now or I don’t eat because I absolutely do not want to see that man.”

There was a knock on the door and Alana glanced towards it curiously. The door opened and Walter watched as Alana’s young boy pushed into the room, a plate in his hand, and came over to the bed, holding the plate out in offering. Walter’s brows furrowed in confusion and he glanced from the plate of food to Alana and back again before slowly taking the plate from Morgan’s hands.

“Thanks, kid,” Walter whispered, unsure of what else to exactly say.

“Mom, your work friend is here,” Morgan said, eyes not leaving Walter and Walter shifted uncomfortably at the thought that the man who had taken his mother from him was in the other room. “I can stay with Wally.” Alana looked hesitant, but slowly rose from where she sat on the edge of the bed and went for the door, keeping it open behind her. “I thought that maybe you would want company,” Morgan continued innocently as Walter set his plate aside on the bedside table, not really hungry. “I can leave though.”

“Um...” Water’s hand dipped into his hair and he shook his head. “No. You can stay, I guess.”

Morgan smiled at that and climbed up onto the bed, settling himself beside Walter, hands folded in his lap and feet swinging over the edge of the bed from the height of it. They were quiet and Walter felt content in the silence. Maybe the kid wasn’t so bad. He could be annoying beyond belief, but that was probably due to the kid’s age. He was decent enough company and Walter supposed that if he was going to be stuck here for the foreseeable future, then he probably needed to make the best of it.

There was a booming voice in the hall and Morgan watched as Walter flinched. Morgan’s head tipped to the side curiously and he dropped from the bed, heading for the still open door. Morgan followed the sound down the hall until he could see a large black man in a long black coat shaking Alana’s hand with a sour expression on his face.

Morgan looked over the man for a moment longer, the image of Walter’s discomfort sharp in his mind. This was the man who had killed his mom, Morgan was sure of it. It didn’t take much to put the pieces together. And Morgan supposed that the man did look the part. He looked large and brutal, controlling. Morgan didn’t like the sight of him much.

Morgan left the hall and wandered back to where Walter’s room was, closing the door to block out that man’s uncommonly loud voice. Morgan’s eyes found Walter curled up on the bed, head hidden under his pillow and Morgan frowned.

“I don’t like him,” Morgan announced and Walter tensed. “I’m sorry he’s here.”

"The world’s pretty fucked up, isn’t it?” Walter’s muffled voice asked and Morgan moved curiously to the bed. “Aren’t the bad guys supposed to be bad and the good guys good? Why is it all topsy turvy now?” There was a weak laugh and Morgan pushed himself back up onto the bed. He reached out slowly and rested his hand on Walter’s ankle and looked out of the window at the snow and ice that was finally starting to slowly melt away. When Walter didn’t fight against the touch, Morgan looked back over to see Walter staring at him. “Why are you so nice to me? You know I hate you, right?”

“Because,” Morgan replied with a shrug, though he didn’t remove his hand from Walter. “You need someone right now. You can shove all of us away and I know that eventually my mom will give up, but I won’t.”

Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

> “Don't be ridiculous, Jack. By now you should know better. No one escapes from Hannibal, he simply leaves or permits you to exist,” Margot said.

Chapter Notes

> Hello everyone!
> I just wanted to let you guys know why the chapter was a bit late this week. My lovely beta had a close relative pass away yesterday and that is honestly much more important than a chapter. Sorry, not sorry. She was super wonderful and edited this for me as quickly as she could so that I could get this chapter out to you guys, but if you could please send her your love and well wishes and prayers for her and her family, that would be amazing of all of you. Much love! Please enjoy.

Losing
You
Terrifies
Me

Hannibal’s eyes focused as much as he could make them and he looked around the room, taking in the sun and the emptiness of it all. He was in bed with a faint bitter taste in his mouth from his mouth having gone dry. His arms ached and when he finally found enough strength to lift them, he could see deep bruising down both of them.

Hannibal slowly pushed himself up in the bed and a frown covered his lips at how alone he was. There was no semblance of life in the room at all other than the open window that was letting a rather nicely warm breeze into the room.

Hannibal's legs shook beneath him as he forced himself to stand and a hand went to his side that was still bandaged. It throbbed dully, but most of the pain was kept at bay and Hannibal could only assume he was being kept on something very good to make it so he wasn't still curled up into the mattress.

Hannibal made his way to the window first and found that most of the snow that had been there when they had arrived had melted away and the sun was a pleasant sort of warmth. He inhaled deeply of the clear air, letting it fill his lungs with a satisfying type of burn.

He turned back to the room after a few moments of quiet and looked at the open door to the room before heading for it. He walked down the hallway and towards where two voices were chattering lightly and Hannibal felt his stomach drop at the idea of there being someone else there with Will and him, if that even was Will.

Hannibal had thought that Will would have stayed by his side indefinitely and he found himself feeling a touch abandoned at the fact that Will hadn't been there when he had awoken. It was a stupid feeling to feel, of course, as were most of the feeling that had come barging down his walls when Will was concerned. Will had always had a way of making Hannibal explore emotions far deeper than any other person could and it always disturbed Hannibal how much Will affected him and how much he let Will affect him. How Will could have his way and there was nothing that Hannibal would do in argument.

whiff of something cooking and his hand went to his stomach, clenching at it. How long had it been since he had eaten? Long enough that his hands felt a little numb and funny. He probably needed something with potassium, maybe some thiamine or magnesium.

He walked into the main room and looked over the scene that was there. Will was at the stove, cooking something and there was a man standing at the counter with a glass of wine. Hannibal could faintly recall the man, knew his voice though he couldn't, for the life of him, place exactly who he was. Blond, tall, strong. Kind enough to gain Will's trust to be allowed into the house.

Will snatched up his own glass and brought it to his lips, eyes flickering up to meet Hannibal and Hannibal watched as Will nearly dropped the glass. The wine spilled over whatever he was cooking and there was a hiss of dislike as the wine evaporated on the burner. Will set the glass aside and Hannibal was surprised to see the way the man raced to him, always so sure that Will would turn away from him, rejecting him once more.

The blond man quickly went to the stove top to save whatever it was that Will had been working on and Will's steps were hurried. Hannibal was tackled in an embrace and he groaned at the strength it took to stay upright as Will clung to him.

"I'm so happy you're alright," Will said in his ear, nose nuzzling against Hannibal's neck and into his hair. Hannibal let his eyes close as Will's hands gripped at him, holding Hannibal in a crushing hug that pained the killer, but he couldn't bring himself to argue. "I don't know what I would have done if I lost you."

"Will," Hannibal croaked out, voice hoarse from disuse. His arms slowly wrapped around the empath and he could feel the way that Will only relaxed further into his body, making it only more difficult for Hannibal to stand upright. "Careful."

"I'm sorry," Will said quickly, dropping his hold on Hannibal and Hannibal frowned, wanting to take back what he had said so that Will would touch him again. He felt so starved for contact, as if it had been years since he had been anywhere close to Will's presence. "I-I made breakfast." Will pointed over his shoulder shyly and Hannibal couldn't help the fond smile that pulled at his lips. "It won't be anywhere near as good as your cooking, but I..." Will's hand went to his curls and dug through them, making them stick up in all sorts of angles that only made Hannibal's heart soften.

His boy didn't need to be ashamed of his cooking. His boy didn't need to be ashamed of anything. His boy would learn to be proud of his efforts. It would take time and work, but Hannibal would see to it. Will would be confident in all things. As confident as he was beautiful.

"I am sure that it will be perfect just as it is," Hannibal assured, voice still soft and weak. Will gave a small nod and a toothy smile before he reached out, taking Hannibal's hand up in his to pull Hannibal to the dining room. Hannibal sat down at the table and folded his hands over the top of it, looking over the blond man that he still couldn't exactly place. The blond man had simply pulled the frying pan from the stove top and set it aside, returning to his glass of wine.

He didn't seem uncomfortable with the present company and Hannibal could only guess what story Will would have told the man. He must have noticed Hannibal's staring because he gave Hannibal a small smile and a nod of his head that Hannibal slowly returned. He wasn't rude at least. Will wouldn't have let the man in like this if the man had been rude. At least, not while Hannibal was recovering. Hannibal couldn't kill the rude in his current state and he honestly didn't really have the want to at this very moment. He didn't need to see blood to be happy right now. Seeing Will was enough.

"'You seem to be doing better," the man commented and Hannibal's eyes narrowed at the voice, unsure of what exactly to make of it. It wasn't threatening, but it held a commanding power to it that unnerved Hannibal. How much control did he have on Will? Was that how the man had gotten in? Will wasn't stupid, but Will could be trusting. Hannibal knew better than anyone how much trust you could pull from the empath before he snapped. "We'll give you another dose of your medicine after you eat. Then you should probably go back to bed."

Hannibal's brow softened slightly and he looked towards where Will was plating three plates with whatever it was he had made. Scrambled eggs most likely by the smell of it and the fact that some horrible plastic bottle full of ketchup was on the counter.

"A doctor," Hannibal finally decided on and Will stopped his work to give a slightly worried look in Hannibal's direction. Will then looked to the blond man before he set the frying pan back down and brought two plates to the table, setting one in front of Hannibal with a wonderfully domestic-like kiss to Hannibal's temple and the other was placed across from Hannibal. Hannibal watched carefully as the blond man sat down and dug in without the good conscience to wait for Will to return with his own plate. "Will, I didn't think that-"

"Please," Will said, voice an absolute beg and Hannibal fell silent. "Be kind." Will took the seat beside Hannibal and squeezed some of the offending tomato puree onto his plate before he reached out and took one of Hannibal's hands, giving it a small squeeze. "Eli has been very helpful."

"Eli," Hannibal repeated, the name familiar on his tongue.

"I don't expect you to remember much, Dr. Lecter," the blond man said around a mouthful of food and Hannibal could feel Will's hand tighten on his in warning as if Will could tell that Hannibal's control was in short supply. "You've been barely conscious for the better part of a week and the few times you were there fully enough to talk, you had a fever and were on many different medications. I would be surprised if you remembered any of it, to be truthful."

"Right," Hannibal agreed tightly, trying to decide the course of actions as naturally as he could and he needed to discuss it with Will to know how many others could be involved, an inconvenience he did not foresee. But he needed to be prepared for such events, always needed to be prepared for such events.

The breakfast passed like a transaction and Hannibal was merely there for his stomach and for Will ´s sake. When they finished, Eli, as he said he would, gave him his dose of medicines and Hannibal was placed back into bed without a word of argument at another small, *please be kind* from Will.

"I will be right with you in a moment," Will said to the other doctor as he brushed Hannibal's hair from his face.

"I will wait. Have a nice day, Dr. Lecter," Eli said as a goodbye, nodding his head as he went for the bedroom door.

"You too… Doctor…?" Hannibal asked to return the courtesy, though his eyes stayed on Will who had yet to stop playing with his hair.

"Starling," Eli clarified, stopping at the door to glance back. "Elijah Starling. Will has my number if you need anything Dr. Lecter."

The door was closed and the moment the click sounded, Will was kissing him soundly. Hannibal gasped for air when Will finally broke the long kiss, eyes brimming with tears, but none of them fell.

"You fucking bastard," Will hissed, fingers once more brushing through Hannibal's hair. "That fever nearly took you twice. That was worse than the cliff."

"You remember the cliff?" Hannibal asked softly, body feeling tired once more despite the amount of rest he had been suspended in.

"Faintly," Will answered with a small nod of his head. "Just pulling you from the ocean and performing CPR. I don't know why I said that." There was a broken kind of laugh from Will. "I say these things and I have no idea where they come from."

"They'll come back to you," Hannibal assured, doing his best to push through the sleep that was pulling on limbs. "You'll remember. I just hope you don't run away when you do again."

"Never," Will replied quickly, shaking his head. "You're supposed to marry me, remember? And I am not about to wait on that any longer."

"I have not forgotten," Hannibal replied with a smile. "As soon as I can stand for more than ten minutes without wanting to fall over, I will marry you."

The smile Will gave was blinding. So full of life and so happy as it pulled at the white scarring in his cheek. The tears that had been there earlier were gone and all that was left was pure, unadulterated happiness and Hannibal wasn't sure if he had ever seen Will this happy before, save for maybe when he had obtained Izzy.

“Will, is Dr. Starling going to be something we need to deal with before we leave here?”

Will’s smile dampened slightly and for the third time in his life, Hannibal wanted to snatch his words back from the universe.

“No,” Will answered, voice soft. “He’s been so good to you, Hannibal and he has a family. They’re beautiful. A daughter and two sons. One of the boys was just born. One of his son’s is around Walter’s age. Maybe a year or two older. They’re beautiful, Hannibal. Please don’t take him from them.”

“Then we will see if we do not need to take care of him. You, the boy and I come first, always,” Hannibal stated and he could see Will’s face twist oddly, though he didn’t seem upset by it.

“You’re still serious about Walter?” He sounded more curious than anything and Hannibal smiled. “I thought that after a time you would-”

“Do not ever doubt me and my word, Will. Please,” Hannibal interrupted, his hand reaching out to pull Will’s fingers from his hair and to his cheek. “I told you that you and your son would never want for anything. I didn’t lie. If I would have passed away, my lawyer has my will. I’ve had it adjusted for you and the boy. It all belongs to you if something were to happen to me.”

“When on earth-why would you do that?” Will asked in breathless surprise, eyes wide and searching Hannibal’s face.

“Just after you fell asleep in the car on our way out once the boy was safe with Alana and Margot,” he explained. “I called my lawyer and made arrangements for you and the boy and the boy alone, just in case.” Hannibal’s smile was sweet just for Will, just to help ease him into the idea.

"You did?”

“I did,” he replied with a nod, bringing Will’s fingers to his lips to kiss.

“Well then, let's make sure you are completely recovered before we come up with a course of action,” Will said standing and pulling his hand free. “I will say goodbye and be back.”

Elijah was patiently in the living room when Will came from Hannibal’s room.

“He will be just fine Will,” Eli said as he pulled on his coat. “There’s nothing to worry about. Keep him on medication for the next few days, hydrated and he needs to recover his strength, so make him sleep and eat.” Will walked Eli to the front door, hands shoved into his pockets. “And if he needs me, just call me right back.” The words were kind and honest.

“Thank you very much,” Will said softly, standing by the door as Eli’s hand rested on the door handle. “I’m really sorry I’ve pulled you away from your family and your work. Please let me pay you-”

“Don't worry and don't be sorry. He is my patient and I am responsible for him.”

“Thank you.” Will wished he could do more, the words didn’t seem to be quite enough.

“Any time.”

Will accompanied the Doctor to his car, the one that all of this had begun in, and then he hurried back to Hannibal´s side. Hannibal's eyes were closed and Will slowly approached the bed before he carefully placed himself beside Hannibal. Hannibal opened his arm to receive him.

"I will cook dinner tonight," he stated softly.

"Of course you will," Will laughed, shaking his head as he snuggled into Hannibal's side, ear pressed to Hannibal's heart as it had been every night, worried that it would stop beating if Will wasn't there to keep it in check.

"I owe you a decent one after all the trouble yo-"

"You would have saved me the trouble if you would have just said that you weren't well, Hannibal." Will's voice was harsher than he meant it and Hannibal grimaced at the words, but he knew Will was right. It would have been so much better if Hannibal had mentioned that he was hurt. "Hannibal, you have to promise me never to do that again."

"Of course," Hannibal whispered, shame in his voice.

Will sat up on his elbow. "Hannibal, I-I need you to understand that I will never change my stance on this. This endangered you and what is going to be our new family and I will never let you hurt that again. Promise me, Hannibal. Promise me that you will never lie or hide anything from me ever again. I couldn't stand living through something like this again because you got some stupid little idea stuck in your head that you're a burden to me. Promise me, please."

"I promise, Will," Hannibal said as he pulled Will closer to him. Will rested himself back against Hannibal's chest and inhaled deeply. "I promise to never lie or hide anything from you again, my darling boy."

"And the kid...?" Jack motioned outside where the two boys were busy playing with the dog in the backyard.

"Spit it out, Jack," Alana said as she sipped on her cup of coffee.

"Does the kid know where Will could be in case he escapes from Hannibal?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Jack. By now you should know better. No one escapes from Hannibal, he simply leaves or permits you to exist," Margot said as she stepped into the terrace to see the kids playing with Applesauce. "And Will is not being held hostage."

"It's always a hope," Jack grumbled, placing aside his own coffee, no longer interested in the drink as his eyes watched the kids playing.

"If I can give you some advice, Jack. That would be, do not upset Will's kid with an interrogation from you. He is not happy with you around and my son isn't either," Alana said with a deep and annoyed sort of sigh. "Let me try to find out that and if you doubt my ethics you can ask someone to monitor the conversation, but Walter must not feel ambushed or threatened. He doesn't like me much and he lives under my roof, I can't imagine who he would like at the moment."

"And he's already said he doesn't know where they are," Margot added, head tipping side to side as if she were thinking. "I have to say that I believe the boy. Will and Hannibal left him just as answerless as he left us."

Jack thought about it for a minute, listening to the child laugh. Jack watched the kid carefully. He seemed fairly well adjusted for his life being uprooted and completely changed. Two weeks hadn't been nearly enough time for Jack when Bella had passed and Jack didn't want to think about what his life would be like when his own mother finally passed.

He sighed with a small nod, tongue bit between his teeth. "He knows more than he's telling you," he said decidedly.

"Even if he does, he's not going to tell you," Alana argued, her tone icy despite the slight warmth the sun was starting to bring around.

Jack growled lowly, hands taking the banister around the terrace. "I will write down a list of questions I need him to answer. I will trust you to record them, Alana."

"I suppose that's the least you owe him, isn't it?" Margot asked snarkily, a frown on her normally tight lined lips.

There was a discomfort in the air as the notion that Margot knew exactly what had happened finally bombarded Jack. How many other people knew? He should have realized that Alana would tell her wife, but for some reason the thought hadn't occurred to him. His teeth felt chocky as he gritted them, but there was a slight relief as Margot left the terrace and out into the yard where the children were still happily playing fetch.

"Have Morgan ask him the questions," Jack instructed, pulling his gloves from his coat pockets to pull them on over his chilled digits that were no longer being warmed by his cup of coffee that was a bit too dark for his liking. He turned away from the kids and headed for the door, feeling the outrage bubble off of the doctor beside him.

"What?" Alana demanded, following Jack back into the house. "Absolutely not. We are not using my son as a pawn."

"You're not going to get any answers from him if you ask," Jack explained with a shrug, finding his way through the house easily from how many long nights he had been spending there recently. "Neither will Margot. And you said so yourself that Walter holds to your son like a teddy bear. He will speak to Morgan."

"No," Alana hissed strongly, her pace keeping up with Jack as they reached the front door, fuming with her anger. "Jack, your methods are so twisted-"

"I get results," Jack shot back as he opened up the front door. "I am good at my job. I am right. Morgan needs to ask Walter those questions. I will get them to you."

"Is this lying?" Morgan asked curiously as the phone was slipped into his pocket by Alana who looked fairly unsettled and had been in a mood most of the evening, though Morgan didn't dare ask what about. Instead he looked over to Margot whose arms were folded over her chest because Alana wasn't answering.

"This is not lying," Margot finally said for Morgan. "We just need Walter to be happy and none of us make him as happy as you."

“But you want me to ask him those questions from dinner?” Morgan looked back to his mother who held out a plate of food for Morgan to take to Walter who had once more skipped dinner.

“It’s to help find where his dad went,” Alana explained, her voice cold. “He misses his dad, doesn’t he?”

Morgan gave a small shrug as he took the plate. “I guess. I told you he doesn’t talk to me much.”

“Just be yourself,” Margot instructed. “It’s ok if he won’t answer. Just try.”

“Alright.” Morgan inhaled deeply, his heart pounding in his chest at the idea of trying to get anything other than harsh words out of Wally and he couldn’t help but wonder how upset the cruelness would make Alana once she listened to the recording. “Don’t be mad with him, please. He lost his mom.”

Before there was an answer from either of his parents, Morgan left the kitchen and headed in the direction of Walter’s room. He stopped at the door and knocked on it, waiting for an answer, but none came. He knocked once more and when nothing came again, he hesitantly opened the door and glanced in.

“Go away,” Walter’s voice ordered grumpily, but Morgan ignored it and stepped inside of the room to find Walter laying on the floor like a starfish, just staring up at the ceiling. Morgan closed the door behind him and stepped closer to Walter. “I said go aw...” Walter trailed off as he sat up enough to finally catch sight of Morgan. “Oh. It’s you.” His head fell back to the floor with a dull thud.

“I snuck you some food. You weren’t at dinner again,” Morgan said in barely more than a whisper. He stopped awkwardly beside Walter’s body and set the plate down on the floor. “I hope-”

“You snuck me dinner?” Walter asked, head flopping to the side to look over Morgan’s stiff form that was still standing there. “Alana is going to have your head if she finds out you’re doing that.”

“She’s strict, but she’s not the Queen of Hearts.”

“The Queen of who?” Walter’s brows furrowed and he pushed himself up onto his elbows.

Morgan gave a confused look. “The Queen of Hearts?” he asked and received a small shrug from Walter. “Alice in Wonderland?” Morgan lowered himself to the ground beside Walter. “Off with her head?” Walter’s lips pursed and he shook his head, causing Morgan to frown. “Do you read anything?”

“Baseball Digest, USA Today Sports Weekly, those kinds of things,” Walter replied, looking over the plate and picking at the garlic bread that was there. He pulled off a small piece and put it in his mouth. “You didn’t have to do this you know.”

“I know,” Morgan replied with a small shrug, sitting more fully on the floor since Walter hadn’t tried to make him leave again. “But you are a guest and no matter what, a guest must feel welcome and secure, as my mom said… And Hanni.” Morgan smiled.

“Hanni,” Walter mused softly, something like distaste on his face as he ate another larger bite of garlic bread.

“Hanni talked about a lot of things,” Morgan continued on.

“What?” Walter sounded almost curious.

“He knows many things. He likes to read like me. He told me I am going to be a socialite. I asked mom and she said he was right. I didn't know what that meant so I tried to look it up, but Hanni explained better.”

“Explained how?” Walter asked, being furious with himself for being interested in that killer. He didn’t need to learn anymore about the man. He was already Hannibal’s biggest fan if a fan was the right word for it.

“He said that I am going to spend a lot of my time with people that would have the same education as me, and same hobbies, and interests. We would know how to run companies and make money, that we would pretend to like each other but we wouldn't really. I wouldn't be able to escape because we would need each other for business reasons. There will be a few genuine people too. They would be there because they would be very successful at their studies and that I should pay attention to them because they would have earned their place not like the rest of us that inherited it,” Morgan explained as he watched Walter dig into the lasagna on the plate. “And… That I will spend a lot of money trying to help others just to look good, but that I can actually do good for others.” He said with a smile. “I would like to help people.”

“What a nightmare,” Walter replied dully through his mouthful of noodles and sauce.

“I don´t know, I haven't had to do any of that yet.”

“Lame.”

“Have you done any of that?”

“No.” Walter snorted and rolled his eyes. “Does it look like I come from money?”

“So… How can that be painful to you if you never tried?” Morgan asked curiously.

“Don’t you get tired of yourself, Brat?”

“No, I really like me,” he said with a smile. “But… You look like you are tired of being you… Aren't you?”

“You are a lot like your mom, you know that?” Walter grumbled as he lifted the plate from the ground to better get at the food and Morgan wondered if Walter had eaten lunch at all with the way he was shoving as much into his mouth as he could.

“Which one?”

“How do you call them to keep them straight?”

“I have a mom and a mother,” Morgan answered, playing with the shoelace on his shoe. He wasn’t asking the questions that Alana had made him memorize over dinner, but at least Walter seemed eased enough to talk openly. “Mom is Alana,” Morgan explained.

“Alright.” Walter nodded his head in understanding. “Mother suits Margot.” There was a smile on Walter’s face at the thought.

“How are you going to call Hanni when you go with your dad?”

“If he sticks around he’ll just be Hannibal.” Walter’s smile dropped and he set the plate aside, the lightness that had been there tightening up quickly. “I don’t expect him to though.”

“Why not?”

“You’re asking a lot of questions, kid.” Walter fell back to the floor, arms and legs spread out once more, though he did grab back at the garlic bread to continue to nibble at it. “Why do you want to know?”

“I’m just curious.” Morgan glanced around the room and slowly stretched out beside Walter who grumbled at the movement, but didn’t say anything against it. “Why would Hanni leave?”

“Because of me.” Walter sighed and closed his eyes. “I’m not good enough for him.”

“Do you want to be good enough for him?”

“Fuck no,” Walter answered, eyes snapping open. “Why would I want anything to do with that man?”

“Your dad likes him. And I like him. I just thought that you-”

“Well, you thought wrong.” The crease in Walter’s brow was deep and troublesome and Morgan resisted the urge to reach out and rub at it like Margot did for him when he couldn’t sleep. He sighed. “Sorry. I just...” Walter gave a huff and flung one of his arms over his eyes. “I don’t like talking about this because I feel like it’s my fault.”

Morgan glanced over to Walter and looked over the older boy’s face for a moment. “It’s not your fault.”

“How is it not my fault?” Walter asked back, chest rising and falling heavily with each breath as if he were crying, but no sobs came from his mouth. “You didn’t hear them in the car on the way over here. I’ve never heard my dad yell like that before. And Hannibal was just so calm. He didn’t say anything unkind or raise his voice, he just held my dad’s hand. I’ve never seen anyone like that when my dad is upset. My mom would yell right back. I’m sure Jack would yell back just to prove he has a louder voice.”

“What did your dad say that makes you think it’s your fault?”

A frown set itself deep in Walter’s lips. “He said that I was the reason that Hannibal wouldn’t leave. I was why Jack had found them. I was why they had to hide.”

“That doesn’t sound like Will,” Morgan offered, thinking back on the small amount of time he had spent with the man. “He was sweet when I met him. Smiling, soft. I can’t see him yelling.”

“It’s nearly impossible to get him to stop!” Walter said with an agitated cry from his throat. “He’s like Newton’s first law of motion. Once you get him moving...” Walter trailed off with a sharp breath through his nose.

“You know Newton’s Laws of Motion but you don’t know what Alice in Wonderland is?” Morgan asked, pushing himself up onto his elbow and shaking his head as if that would help him understand better. “What kind of school do you go to?”

“Public?” Walter asked back with a sarcastic snort. “I’m not some rich preppy school boy who studies French and reads poetry and-”

“I don’t know French,” Morgan shot back. Walter’s arm lifted from his face and he gave Morgan an incredulous look with a raised brow. “I know German.”

“See?” Walter said with a hard smile, sitting up on his elbow to face Morgan. “Kid, they don’t teach that type of shit in public schools. I’m lucky I know my numbers up to ten in Spanish.”

“You can only count to ten in Spanish?”

“Stop being a showoff, kid,” Walter murmured as he took another bite of his dinner before laying back down. “I know a bit of Lithuanian, though.”

“Why Lithuanian?” Morgan asked and there was a shrug in response. Morgan thought about pushing the question, but it wasn’t one that had been on the piece of paper and he had already strayed pretty far off topic. “Did your dad say where they were going?”

Walter tensed at that and Morgan watched curiously as Walter chewed thoughtfully before swallowing. “No,” he eventually answered bitterly. “Just that I was the problem then they dumped me here with you.”

“And they didn’t tell you how to reach out to them?”

“Look!” Walter nearly shouted, sitting up fully and turning to focus his attention on Morgan, cheeks red with anger. “My dad said I was a problem, Hannibal told him to calm down and he shut up the rest of the ride. I fell asleep in the back seat, was put into this bed and ditched. Are you happy? I’m not sure what else I could possibly tell you.”

“Have you tried to reach out to Will?” Morgan sat up fully now, doing his best to keep his voice as nice as he possibly could. Walter seemed to do better with niceties than demands. Alana was always too forward and harsh with her questions. Walter had opened up more to Margot, or that’s what Morgan had figured when they took hours to return from their morning rides instead of the normal hour that Morgan got. “He would answer you if you tried, wouldn’t he?”

Walter sighed and lowered his head into his hands, crossing his legs for his elbows to rest on. “Why do you always ask so many questions, kid? You’re exhausting.”

“You don’t have to answer them. I just wanted to understand. I didn’t mean to upset you,” Morgan said quickly in apology.

“I had one text from him my first day here,” Walter whispered from behind his hands. “He said he loved me and that he would come back for me. Nothing else. Just that he would come back. He hasn’t answered a single one of my texts since.”

“I’m sorry.” Morgan pulled his knees into his chest, unsure of what else to do or ask. There had been a ridiculous amount of questions on that paper that his mom had given him but none of them seemed important anymore and it was clear that Walter wouldn’t have an answer for anything. Will was gone and silent and Hannibal would disappear like a black cat against the night sky. Alana and Margot had said so enough so it must have been true. They wouldn’t be found unless they wanted to be. “Will will come back for you.”

“How do you know?” Walter’s voice cracked as he spoke, broken and small. “How could you possibly know?”

“He came back for Hanni,” Morgan reasoned gently. “Why wouldn’t he come back for you? He loves you.”

“I doubt that.”

“Wally, I overheard a conversation with my mother and Hanni in the stables one day.” Morgan rested his chin on his knees and waited until Walter looked up from his hands curiously. “He said that the reason Will wouldn’t leave with him was because he was trying to gain custody of you. Though I’m not exactly sure what that means.”

“He did?” Walter blinked several times and seemed to hold his breath for a long while before he released it again. “He was going to fight for me.”

“Fight for you?” Morgan found himself asking. “What do you mean?”

“My mom and him were getting a divorce. He was trying to make sure that he could stay my dad.”

“Why would he not be able to be your dad?”

“My mom didn’t want him to be around me. She thought he was dangerous.”

Morgan gave a small laugh that caused Walter’s mouth to tip down. “Will isn’t dangerous.”

Walter shook his head. “You have no idea what hides behind his smile, kid. You don’t have any idea what he’s done.”

“If they’re bad, I’d rather not know,” Morgan decided. “Why does Jack want them anyways? What did Hanni and Will do?”

“You just said you didn’t want to know,” Walter pointed out, straightening out his body once more so he could reach for and finish off his plate of food. “I will tell you if you want to know.” Morgan quickly shook his head and Walter nodded. “It’s probably for the best that you don’t know.”

There was an easy silence between them as Walter finished his food and Morgan found that he didn’t mind the quiet. It was nice in a way that the other quiets in the house weren’t. There was something warm about this one when the others in his life felt so very cold and Morgan didn’t want it to end.

“Do you have to leave when they come to get you?”

Walter shrugged. “It’s not like I can decide. I’m not 18.”

“Do you want to go with them?”

“Well, I don’t want to stay here.”

“Why?”

Walter groaned and placed his empty plate aside, head thrown back. “Kid, come on. Why do you ask so many questions?” Morgan gave an embarrassed shrug and hid his face in his knees. The silence settled back in for a moment before there was a sigh. “I just... miss my mom. My dad is all I have left and so if he comes to get me, then that means he loves me, right? That means that he cares about me and I want that. I want someone in my life who wants me.”

“I want you,” Morgan muttered from his knees. “I like you living here.”

“You like that you’re not bored anymore because you have me to annoy at your leisure.”

“Maybe.”

There was a laugh from Walter and Morgan looked up to see a tired sort of smile on Walter’s face. “Thanks for the food kid,” Walter said, voice low and nearly a whisper. “I’m getting tired. I think I’m going to try to sleep.”

“Oh,” Morgan said, slowly getting to his knees. “Alright.” He scooped up the plate and rose to his feet heading for the door, but he stopped, eyes down. “Wally, there was something that Jack said when he was at dinner last night.” There was a low growl from Walter at the name and Morgan closed his eyes. “He said that Hanni had your mom’s cell phone. Maybe you can try texting that? Maybe Will would answer.”

“I... Thank you.”

“Good night Wally.”

“Night kid.”

Chapter 34

Chapter Summary

“Don’t go, Wally,” Morgan begged. “You don’t know where they are.”

“I’ll find them.” Walter was always so determined. “There are enough first edition books in here that I’m sure I can find a shop that I can sell them at. I’ll get money, find my way to Vermont and start there. That’s where you said Jack said they were, right?”

“Yes, Vermont,” Morgan agreed. “But Wally-”

“I’m going and there’s nothing you can do to stop me.”

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone! I hope you're having a wonderful day! Thank you so much for all of the kind comments and well wishes. My beta has been thoroughly overwhelmed with your kindness. She asked me to thank you all and to let you know that she is doing better. Gave me a scare with her own health issues, but she is on the mend and the family is slowly healing.

Hope you all enjoy this chapter. We're slowly getting closer to the end and I'm getting pretty excited with all the stuff that's coming up. Thank you for sticking with me through such an insane ride. Love you all.

Losing You Terrifies Me

Another week had passed without much incident, though Will had over seasoned dinner once or twice. But how was he supposed to know the difference between a teaspoon and a tablespoon when they were labeled ts and tbs? In hindsight it should have been more clear, but when Will was attempting not to burn several different things at once he became muddled.

Hannibal was back to himself, though he was still sleeping most of the day and night. Will hardly saw him unless the killer got up and wandered into the kitchen hungry, which could be any hour of the day or night and it was starting to drive Will a little crazy to wake up at three in the morning to the smell of spices or baking or being asked to cook a five star dish as soon as he had returned from his run. Though Will couldn't be upset with the brownies Hannibal had woken him with at midnight the night before.

Will entered the house with a huff of air, knees shaking from the increase in his miles, but he was up to three now which was better than it had been in Louisiana. He inhaled deeply of the air and smelt an odd mixture that he couldn't exactly place, though it wasn't all bad. Instead he made his way into the kitchen, pushing sweaty locks of hair from his face and came to a stop.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Will asked taking in how every inch of the dining table and nearly every inch of the counters were covered in different baked goods. Hannibal glanced up from where he was whisking something at the stove and his face was the picture of innocence.

“I can't believe you ran in the rain. You'll make yourself sick,” Hannibal shot back and Will rolled his eyes.

“You have no room to speak about being sick and it was just drizzling.” Will licked at his lips and his hands rested on his hips as he tried to steady his still racing breath. “I was gone for an hour and you managed to run a whole bake sale on your own.”

Will stepped closer to the table and looked over the mass amounts of cookies that were an assortment of all types. Beside that were those gooey brownies that would be full of melted chocolate chunks and Will wished he had picked a different time to start working out again. Beside that there looked to be a pie of some sort, Lemon Meringue maybe.

“We have two ovens, Hannibal. How the hell did you manage all of this?” Will grabbed a snickerdoodle from a stack on a cooling rack and took a bite of it, though he didn't give Hannibal the satisfaction of how wonderfully buttery the cookie was despite the way the man was watching and waiting for an expression. Will simply moved over to the counter where more cookies were cooling as were a pan of what could have been cinnamon rolls waiting for their turn in the ovens, both of which were on. “And what the fuck are you making now?”

“American toffee,” Hannibal replied, though he didn't so much as abandon his post when Will purposefully let his cookie crumble across Hannibal's clean workspace. A disapproving frown was all that Will received.

“And you what? Stress bake?” Will teased, wandering over to the stove to look into the pot that Hannibal was diligently stirring to find a golden bubbling mess of stickiness.

“I am not stressed. I was bored and you weren't here to entertain me.”

“That is not my job,” Will reprimanded with a smile as he took another bite of his cookie before holding it out for Hannibal to share. Hannibal grinned and took a bite of Will's offering before Will shoved the rest into his mouth. “What's in that?” Will motioned to the pot and stepped out of the way when Hannibal reached over to the container of tools to pull out what must have been a thermometer of some kind that Hannibal plunged into the sticky sweetness and watched carefully while continuing to stir.

“Butter, sugar, water, salt and some vanilla,” Hannibal replied, sighing when the thermometer didn't read the temperature that he wanted and he kept stirring. “Would you mind chopping up almonds for the top?”

“American toffee?” Will asked as he went to the sink to wash his hands. “Isn't it English toffee?”

“They are fairly similar,” Hannibal explained easily. “English toffee is made with brown sugar instead of white and is not topped with nuts, but I personally enjoy the almonds.” Hannibal’s attention was pulled up at the oven as one of the timers went off and he gave a huff. “Will, I’m afraid that I always forget how long this needs to be stirred for. Would you please make sure that the cakes don't burn and get the cinnamon rolls into the oven once it’s clear?”

Will rolled his eyes with a small smile and walked over to Hannibal, kissing at the back of the man’s head before finding some hot pads and opening the oven. The air was warm and smelt strongly of honey. Will carefully pulled out the two cake pans and set them down on the stovetop that wasn’t being used. He closed up the oven again and glanced over the golden cakes, a color he had never seen on a cake before.

“I still have several questions, Hannibal,” Will stated with a small smile. Hannibal glanced up with a hum in answer. “How the hell did you make all of these things?” Will moved over to fetch the cinnamon rolls and added them to the oven, setting a time as Hannibal instructed.

“I’ve been prepping them all for a while now. Some of them do take some planning.”

“Right,” Will said with a nod as he went over to the other counter where a cutting board and a rather large knife were waiting with a package of almonds beside them. Will dumped some of them out and went about chopping them which was proving far more difficult than he thought when several shot out from under the knife and raced across the kitchen floor. “And what are you going to do with all of this? We can’t eat all of this.”

“It’s a thank you.”

Will paused and glanced over his shoulder where Hannibal was fiddling with the thermometer again. “For who?”

“Dr. Starling.”

Will stared at the man for a moment in utter shock and then around at all of the treats, mouth slack. “Eli?” Will finally asked. “Why?”

“I have glimpses of what happened, Will. As much as I would have preferred that no one else knew that we were here, he did help me and helped you, I’m sure. He also has yet to have law enforcement rain down on this place.” Hannibal’s hand paused for a moment in thought before he began stirring again. “I owe him and you my life.”

Will felt a small smile tug at his lips and he quickly went back to chopping up the almonds into odd shapes, though Hannibal didn’t correct him so he assumed it was alright.

“Two more questions, Hannibal.”

“God forbid you seek out knowledge, dear Will.”

Will chuckled and stepped away from the cutting board and over to the stove to once more look over the cakes. “I’ve never seen a cake that color before. What is it?”

“A traditional Lithuanian honey cake. We used to eat it with tea when I was younger. I suppose I might be feeling a bit nostalgic,” Hannibal replied with a sad sort of tilt to his voice, though his lips stayed happy in their smile. “That is specifically for us. We don’t have to share it.”

“A wedding cake maybe?” Will asked hopefully watching as Hannibal’s face twisted into several different emotions before it settled back into its normally blank expression. “That’s my last question, Hannibal. You can stand now, you’re not as tired anymore, you’ve stopped taking your medication, your wound is healed. Please, let’s get married. I can’t stand not being tied to you anymore.”

“Impatient little boy,” Hannibal scolded with no bite to his voice. “Good things come to those who wait. And I believe that we have some things to discuss before we go about with a ball and chain.”

“What for?”

“I believe it is important for both of us to know what to do in case we need to go in different directions and where to reunite,” Hannibal explained, once more messing with the thermometer.

“What?” Will stepped to the side as Hannibal finally gave a nod and reached for two hot pads to remove the pot with boiling sugar from off of the stove.

“I do not have the illusion that we are going to have a normal and boring routine life, especially if I am involved. And you need to know all my assets and what to use in what case, how and where,” Hannibal explained as he poured the angry bubbling sugar out onto a sheet pan, carefully scooping at the pot with the spoon in his hand. “Once all of that is in order, then we will get married. We have to use all of our real information for this first step and I want to make sure all of it is perfect. I’m not risking you just so we can be legally bound.”

“Hannibal...” Will whispered, a hurt feeling clogging up his chest. He folded his arms over his chest as if that could help conceal the emotion from his voice. “You said-”

“I know what I said, my love.” Hannibal placed the pot back onto the stove top and Will was surprised to see all of the man’s attention fully on him and not on what was being baked any longer. Hannibal’s hands took Will’s hips and pulled Will to him, nosing into Will’s curls. “And I will marry you. I promise, my love. Losing you terrifies me and I want to make sure that that won’t happen.”

“And how are we going to have a judge that… Well?” Will asked, tipping his head back to let Hannibal’s lips carefully trace the line of his neck.

“I still have a contact that owes me something.”

“I believe that one day those contacts may be needed,” Will muttered, letting himself be pushed into the counter and trapped there. “Is it wise to use them now?”

“There are many people who I keep happy until they are needed. That would be something you need to memorize, Will,” Hannibal whispered as he kissed at Will’s neck taking in the salty scent of Will’s run from his skin.

“Normal couples talk about vows and mortgages,” Will smiled with a small chuckle as Hannibal’s trailed up Will’s pulse.

“We will discuss countries, bank accounts, fake passports and identities. All of it, if this is still what you want.”

“Of course this is what I want.” Will gave a small sigh at the gentle kiss to the dip in the back of his jaw, melting into Hannibal’s touch.

“For you and the boy?”

Will’s smile fell and Hannibal leaned back at the stiffness that filled the air. “Oh,” Will whispered. “I didn’t... I...” Will shook his head and leaned forward to place his head to Hannibal’s shoulder. “He won’t like all of the traveling and the new schools and...” Will trailed off once more and placed a kiss to Hannibal’s shoulder. “Why do you always have to be so logical? I hate you.”

“I just want what’s best for the both of you.” Hannibal placed a kiss to Will’s hair and ran his hands up Will’s back soothingly. “There’s a reason I want to wait a little longer. I want to make sure everything is set up so that we can live exactly how we want.”

“I am pretty sure that he will hate it, but he will come around, for me, and you need to know that he...” Will didn´t know how to explain it so he went silent.

“He is interested in me, Will. He is smart and curious, he speaks Lithuanian,” Hannibal offered gently as some sort of consolation and Will wasn’t exactly sure what Hannibal meant by it.

“He… W-what?” Will asked, pushing back so he could meet Hannibal’s amber gaze.

“I’m sure we can discuss the details later, but let’s say he’s very much like his dad and can’t leave anything alone until he knows everything.” Hannibal smiled and placed a kiss to Will’s cheek. “I know he doesn't like me much, so he and I will just need to figure it out for you. But there’s nothing that either of us wouldn’t do for you. Your kid is loyal if nothing else.”

“Hannibal, I honestly…” Will gave a deep sigh. “I have no idea how this is going to work but I won't lose you or him. That’s not a compromise I will make. It’s both of you.”

“I am well aware,” Hannibal muttered with a nod, kissing Will’s lips chastely. “I won’t give up on Walter.”

A smile covered Will’s lips and he kissed Hannibal again. “Thank you.”

Hannibal pulled back as the timer on the oven went off and he went to it to fetch out the cinnamon rolls. “Now that that is a bit more settled, we should have Dr. Starling for dinner.”

“Hannibal,” Will said sternly.

“As a guest, dear Will,” Hannibal assured with a chuckle. “There is no way that both you and I could consume this amount of sweets in a timely manner and I won’t have any of them frozen.”

“You are impossible,” Will said, laughing with a shake of his head.

“Will, can you please fetch the chocolate from the pantry and put some over the toffee before it cools?”

“Of course.”

Will went for the pantry, inhaling deeply of the spices that swirled through the air but stopped at an odd little chime from somewhere in the other room. The air went still and Will glanced over at Hannibal who had frozen stiff.

Will knew the song. He knew the tone and had heard it many times before. Brahms' lullaby for Molly's darling son. Will's heart sank and he moved from the pantry and then towards the sound. It was coming from the front closet where Will had tossed many things just to keep the house tidy and bad memories out of mind.

"Will, we need to turn off that phone and move. I didn't realize it was still on," Hannibal said quickly, chasing after Will as Will dug through the closet for the melody that had restarted.

"It's Walter."

"You don't know that," Hannibal argued as he watched Will throwing things out of the closet and across the front entry until his hands latched onto Hannibal's jacket and his hands rifled through the pockets, the phone's ringing louder now. "It could be Jack or anyone Will. Give me the phone and grab your things. We need to leave."

Will shook his head and held up Molly's phone for Hannibal to see. Walter's name was on the screen as the lullaby continued to play. Hannibal sighed and shook his head, but he knew nothing, not even the most sound of logic, would stop Will from answering that phone.

Hannibal ran a hand through his hair and stepped away to head back into the kitchen, thinking of which safe house they could get to without a car. They would need to steal one or rent one or maybe he would just need to owe Dr. Starling a million favors.

"Hello?" Will asked into the phone and Hannibal's stomach did a flip as his mind tried to reason over itself. His hand went for a knife in the knife block on instinct and he had to force himself to release it. That wasn't what he wanted. "Walter."

It was the kid.

Hannibal looked up as Will came into the kitchen, phone on speaker and the child's voice came through the line, muffled.

"Dad, Jack wants to talk to you."

Hannibal felt his blood run cold and he shook his head once more. "Will," he hissed sternly. "Turn off the phone. We need to go. Jack is not going to help us anymore."

"What does Jack want, Wally?" Will asked, ignoring Hannibal's warnings, though he could feel the glare that was being dug into his back. He glanced over Hannibal's stance and shuttered at the thought that he looked like how he did years ago in his kitchen in Baltimore. Shoulder hunched and arms flexed, ready to reach for a weapon if needed. Will glanced around and slowly pushed the knife block from Hannibal's reach.

"Alana and him are planning something to help you come get me," Walter explained on the other side of the line. "They don't know that I'm calling you though. I didn't tell them. They sent Morgan to talk to me. He had a phone in his pocket recording."

"All kids have phones, Walter," Will offered, watching as Hannibal paced, obviously antsy with how long Will was still on the line.

"Alana doesn't approve of electronics. She won't even let Morgan watch TV. He doesn't have a phone," Walter pointed out and Will could note the slight pause in Hannibal's steps at the curious observation.

“Did you find out for certain that she was recording your conversation?” Will asked, a hand reaching out to still Hannibal. Will tried to give Hannibal a reassuring look as he squeezed the killer’s hand.

“No, Morgan told me.”

“Why would he tell you?” Hannibal asked bitterly and Will did his best to ignore Hannibal’s tone. Hannibal had every right to be upset. Will knew he was being stupid but it had been three weeks and he had to know what things looked like. He had to know that Walter was ok.

“He felt bad for tricking me,” Walter explained with the tone of a shrug. “After I pointed out that he didn’t have a phone.”

“Do you believe him?” Hannibal asked once more, stepping a little nearer to Will who let his thumb trace soothing circles into the back of Hannibal’s hand.

“I am not sure, so I called you to tell you that I am ok and that they want to talk. Jack’s been here nearly every night. I only catch bits and parts of what they say. They’re trying to reach out to you. They want to talk with you.”

“Are you sure they are not listening?” Will questioned, pulling Hannibal just close enough that he could wrap his arm around the killer’s waist. Will placed a kiss against Hannibal’s shirt.

“Not here.”

“They could be recording, Walter. They would be watching this line. Listen to me. I will find you, be patient, don't ever call this number again. Do you understand? I will reach out to you when it’s safe to do so.”

“You promise you’re going to come get me right?” Walter asked hurriedly and Will frowned at the worry in the child’s voice. “Promise, dad.”

“I promise,” Will assured before he hung up the call. He couldn’t listen to his son’s begging. He would want to leave now if Walter asked him to. He would go back to his son, everything else be damned. “We need to leave,” Will announced after a moment of tense silence. He held out the phone to Hannibal who snatched it up and took it to the sink. He dropped it down the drain and flipped a nearby switch. Will winced at the loud and angry grinding sound that came from the garbage disposal as it smashed up the phone before it whirled into silence. “Grab your things.”

Hannibal was silent, lips tight in a thin line, the anger radiating off of him hot. Will could see the vein in Hannibal’s head tick and his hands opened and closed a few times, muscles tense.

“I needed to know, Hannibal. If it were you, I woul-” Will started but Hannibal interrupted him.

“Jack shouldn't have involved Walter, not after Molly.”

Will gave a small sigh, following after Hannibal as Hannibal moved to their bedroom. He tossed the door open and went about the room grabbing a few odds and ends, but nothing much else.

“There will be things at the next house. Just grab what you need,” Hannibal instructed, tone flat and bland.

“Hannibal,” Will tried again, following Hannibal around the room from place to place nearly feeling like a lost puppy. “Hannibal, if it were you-”

“We will discuss this later,” Hannibal interrupted once more. “Now be that cunning boy you are and shut up and pack.” Will fell silent and still as Hannibal made his way to the door, the several items he had picked up in his hands. Will stared after Hannibal who eventually came to his own stop at the bedroom door. Hannibal’s tense body slowly loosened and his head dropped forward on a weak neck, the items in his hands hitting the floor. “I’m so sorry Will.” Hannibal turned around and his heart cracked at the absolutely hurt look over the empath’s face. “I never meant to- I didn’t mean...” Hannibal sighed, a hand going to his hair. “That was so utterly and incredibly rude of me. I never... I’m sorry.”

“Shut up and pack. Got it,” Will whispered with a nod, turning away from Hannibal and heading to the closest to grab his gun.

“Will I-” Hannibal fell silent at the sound of the gun being loaded and cocked.

“Follow your own advice, Hannibal. Shut up and pack.”

Jack’s phone rang and he glanced down at Zeller’s name with a sigh before declining the call and returning to the conversation at hand with Alana. “We’ve been able to update their DNA in the files and all through CODIS. There are two bodies waiting on ice for them.”

“And how long can those bodies sit on ice?” Alana asked with a small roll of her eyes. “We still haven’t found them yet.” There was another ring and Jack looked at his phone once more to find Zeller’s name again on the screen. “I think that you are needed.”

“So it would seem,” Jack replied, answering the call and placing the phone to his ear. “What?”

“Molly’s phone pinged. We have an address, but if you want to be there, we need to get someone over there now,” Zeller said quickly.

“How did her phone ping? No one has been trying to reach out to it,” Jack muttered, a hand going to his head. “I told you guys to wait until we had everything in order before we reached out to him.”

“It wasn’t us,” Zeller assured.

“We wouldn’t do that Jack!” Price’s voice called in the distance, muffled.

“Who else knew that Molly’s phone-” Jack broke off, eyes wide and looked up at Alana who sat up a little fuller in her chair. “Get there and stop them from leaving. They’ll run. I’ll catch the next flight out.”

“You got it boss,” Zeller replied, ending the call.

“Where is he?” Jack asked, getting to his feet.

“Wally!” Alana called, getting to her feet from the dining table, the files and files of information no longer mattering to her. “Walter! Please get in here immediately!”

“If we lose them-”

“Will will come back for Walter,” Alana assured with a wave of her hand, the other on her waist as she shifted her weight from foot to foot. “Walter!” There were rushing footsteps down the hall and Alana let out a deep breath of air when the dining room door opened and the young boy’s head poked in. “Come here, please.” Walter stepped into the room, but stopped when his eyes fell on Jack and Alana took a step forward, only causing Walter to jump back. “Come here, please,” Alana repeated and Walter shook his head.

“No. Not with him here,” Walter replied softly, backing up into the door. Walter reached for the door handle but jumped at Jack’s voice.

“Sit down!”

Walter’s eyes went wide and Alana’s face fell slightly. “Jack,” Alana scolded harshly before her gaze softened and she looked towards Walter. “Wally, we just need to talk to you for a moment. Can you please sit down?” Walter shook his head slowly, eyes tight on Jack whose face was in a deep scowl. “Very well.” Alana sighed, a hand going to her head. “Walter, please be honest with me. Did you call your mom’s phone?”

“What?” Walter asked softly, pressing himself back against the door as if to make himself smaller.

“Did you call Molly’s phone?” Jack repeated, his voice strained as he tried to keep it down and Walter had to guess that he had never been very good with children.

“Why would I try to call my mom’s phone?” Walter asked, eyes flickering between Alana and Jack, unable to settle on either one of them. “She’s dead, remember?”

“Were you trying to reach out to your dad?” Alana questioned, taking a step towards Walter who someone only sunk back further against the door. Walter shook his head. “Please tell me the truth, Walter.”

“He won’t answer my texts. Why would he answer a phone call?” Walter licked at his lips and Alana tipped her head to the side as the boy’s eyes went to the floor, not daring to look up. “You said he was hiding. Can’t they track phone calls? They do it in the movies all of the time, you are the experts. I don't want to be here and if you don't want me here, then just call the government, unless...” Walter paused, finally looking up to meet Alana’s gaze head on. “Unless you want to piss off a man like Hannibal Lecter.”

“Walter, that's enough,” Alana said, waving at the boy to dismiss him.

“For once I agree, Doctor. I never, *never,* want to be in the same room this hypocrite is,” Walter said, running away from Alana and Jack and from the room, the door slamming behind him.

“Mom, why are you treating him like this?” Morgan asked, stepping into the room from where he had been hidden from behind the door, closing the door softly behind him.

“Morgan, it is rude to listen in on other people's conversation, an-” Alana started.

“It is much worse to mistreat a boy who has lost his family, that you said you would take care of and you make him be with the only person he can stand less than the rest of us,” Morgan said, facing Jack, voice strong as he spoke. “He doesn't like him, mom. What would Hanni say? Would you let anyone who took me be in the same room as me?” Morgan asked, running out of the room as well, though the door didn’t slam like it had behind Walter.

“Jack, I am going to ask you to leave”

“Alana, if Walter-”

“I doubt any of us is going to be capable of speaking with him again to find out anything about Will,” Alana said breathlessly, her nails tapping on the table. “And he is right Jack. You’re the expert. Find someone else other than Walter to do your job. You’re not turning him into another Abigail Hobbs.” There was a deep inhale as Alana calmed and straightened herself up. “Now if you excuse me I have a domestic crisis with a pre-teen and a little boy. If you want to catch Will and Hannibal before they disappear for good then I suggest you hurry and catch your flight. Jimmy and Brian won’t be able to hold those two,” Alana said as she made her way to the dining room door to follow after her son.

“This isn't over, Alana,” Jack said as he got to his feet.

“Of course it’s not. It's far from that, Jack. I had made peace with Hannibal and now, by trying to help you, I put my position in the same place that it was before Walter came in, if not worse.” Alana’s hand clutched at the door handle tightly, anger making her breath run hot. “I told you before that I do not like to owe Hannibal Lecter any favors and you are not going to be the reason he comes to collect.”

“I can show myself out then?” Jack asked as he gathered up all of his paperwork.

“I think that would be suitable,” Alana answered, opening the door and leaving the room in search of the two children.

Morgan’s room was empty, as was Margot’s. Margot had some business to attend to and was out for the night, the house feeling a little empty without her. She was much better with children and Alana couldn’t help but wish that Margot could help her with the situation.

She stopped outside of Walter’s room and was about to knock when voices made her stop.

“Don’t go, Wally,” Morgan begged. “You don’t know where they are.”

“I’ll find them.” Walter was always so determined. “There are enough first edition books in here that I’m sure I can find a shop that I can sell them at. I’ll get money, find my way to Vermont and start there. That’s where you said Jack said they were, right?”

“Yes, Vermont,” Morgan agreed. “But Wally-”

“I’m going and there’s nothing you can do to stop me.”

Alana pushed open the door and looked over the scene that had been playing out. Morgan stood beside the window that had been pushed open. Walter stood outside, a backpack slung over his shoulders that was budging with, most likely, books and the clothes that Alana had bought him. He looked flushed and angry, winter coat on and ready to brace the still rather frigid nights.

“Thanks for having me, but I don’t want to be here anymore.” Walter’s voice was strong and steady, mind made up.

“Walter, please, I need you to understand,” Alana said, stepping into the room. Walter didn’t run so that had to be a good sign.

“No, I do not need to understand. You’re the adults, you’re the Doctor. You must understand that I am not here because I want and if I am such an inconvenience I have my grandparents, even a second rate aunt that I can stay with. You don't have to have me and I don’t want to see you ever again. You have no right to hold me here!”

“Please Walter,” Alana tried once more, pushing inside of the room a little further. Walter still didn’t move as Alana came to stand by the window, a hand on Morgan’s shoulder.

“I know you don’t want me here. I didn't have the choice, but now you need to listen to me,” Walter hissed, pointing at Alana with a shaking hand. “You call someone who is willing to help me be with the closest thing I can have to a family or I call 911.”

“Please stay the night an in the morning we will discuss what to do and-”

“We will discuss what is going to happen tonight!” Walter shouted, finally stepping further away from the open window. “I am not going to stay here where that fucking murderer is welcome. I want my dad!”

“Wally, please stay,” Morgan said in a small voice. “Don’t go.” His hand reached out towards Walter but the older boy only pulled further away into the night.

Walter’s eyes dropped back towards Alana. “What do I have to stay for?”

“Here’s what we’re going to do,” Alana said as calmly as she could, looking between both of the boys. “I will work tonight to reach Hannibal and Will. If I cannot reach them then I will get in touch with your family and find someone who will take you.”

“Liar.”

Alana’s eyes narrowed at Walter’s accusation and her jaw ticked. “You are welcome to stay up with me all night while I work if you do not believe me. You stay until tomorrow and I promise I will never ask you about your dad again and I promise that Jack will never be near you again.”

“Forgive me if I don’t trust you,” Walter shot back.

“Alright,” a mild tone said from somewhere outside. Walter spun around and felt himself go silent as Margot stepped through the darkened yard lightly with hands behind her back. “How about we get a cup of cocoa and talk about this, Wally? It’s pretty cold tonight, isn’t it?”

“I guess,” he whispered, eyes wandering over Margot carefully. If there was anyone he was going to have to spend the night with it would be Margot. She just let things be. She didn’t push, didn’t argue, didn’t try to force her way in. Margot’s hand took his shoulder and he found his body betraying him and relaxing into the calm hold.

“Ok, then everyone to the kitchen. Can someone please explain to me what happened in my absence?” Margot asked as she led Walter from the window and through the night.

“Mother, Wally is upset,” Morgan explained desperately when Margot and Walter were out of hearing range.

“How very unfortunate that our guest is in such a bad mood,” she said kindly, though Morgan could clearly see the frown across his mom’s face. Alana moved over to the open window and pulled it shut. “Maybe this peace offering will help. Come on. Do as your mother said. To the kitchen.”

“What do you mean?” Morgan asked curiously as he was guided from the bedroom and down the hall. Morgan glanced around the kitchen curiously and Alana noted the hesitation in her son’s stance before he went to join Walter at the counter bar stools.

”How about I make the cocoa?” Margot offered sweetly, her smile small as she leaned against the counter with folded arms. She was always better with children. “And we will let Wally decide what we have for dinner. Then Wally, and only Wally,” -Margot’s eyes met her wife’s in warning- “will tell me exactly what happened while I was away. Does that sound appropriate to everyone?”

There were small nods from everyone and Margot went about pulling out a pan from one of the hooks over the island and put it on the stove. She grabbed the milk from the fridge and gave a smile at the hushed voice that belonged to Morgan.

“I only get to pick what’s for dinner on my birthday.”

There was an exasperated sigh from Walter as he let the backpack that was still on his person drop to the floor. There was a loud thud from the bag from all of the books he had stolen, but no one made any comment about it. Instead Alana simply joined her wife in the kitchen and got down the hot chocolate packets and passed them to Margot.

“What would you like for dinner, Wally?” Alana questioned.

“Anything?” Walter asked softly, head leaning across his folded arms on the counter.

“Anything,” Margot assured with a nod, stirring at the pot on the stove.

“Can we have those dinosaur chicken nuggets and tater tots?”

Margot looked over with a small laugh and nodded. She glanced over at Alana who rolled her eyes.

“I will get my purse,” Alana announced. “Morgan. Come with me. Let’s let Walter have some time alone.”

“But mom-”

“Come now Morgan. Be quick about it,” Alana ordered a little more intensely and Morgan jumped from his stool immediately. “Be back soon.”

“Make sure there are pterodactyls,” Walter called and Morgan gave an enthusiastic nod as he rushed after Alana. There was a clank as a steaming mug that was set down in front of Walter on the counter. Walter glanced up to see that thin lined smile across Margot’s lips. “Do you have any whipped cream?”

“‘I’m sure there might be some around here,” Margot said with a breath of air, moving over to the fridge. She came back with a can and sprayed some over the top of Walter’s mug and the fluffy cream immediately began to melt into the drink. “Morgan really likes you, you know. He hasn’t been this excited about dinner, even for his birthday.”

Walter picked up the mug and took a small trial sip and put the mug back down with a pained expression, licking his tongue over his lips at the drink being too hot. “It’s because he doesn’t know many other kids," Walter muttered, finger dipping into the whipped cream to swirl it.

"He's met plenty of children. We have to make sure he grows up with the right families to continue the family business. He prefers you above all of them though."

"I don't think he should." Walter licked the cream from his finger before he laid his head back on the counter.

"How about you go put your coat back and then hopefully your cocoa will be cool and then we can talk without the others here. Does that sound good?" Margot gave Walter a smile and the boy sighed heavily, but did as instructed, climbing down from the barstool and picking up the rather heavy backpack.

"I'm sorry for taking the books. My dad would have paid for them and-"

"Don't worry about it Wally." Margot came around the counter and lowered herself to the boy's height with kind blue eyes. "Go put your things away and then we'll talk. I have some things that I need to tell you as well." Her hand gently caressed over Walter's cheek and Walter froze at the feeling of his own mother's warmth in Margot's hand. His chest clenched painfully.

"Thanks," he whispered as he pulled from her grip and left the kitchen.

He stopped outside of the door and glanced around at the hallways before him. He didn't have to stay. He could leave now. Margot wouldn't stop him. He honestly wasn't sure where he would go. He had no idea which direction Vermont was, but he could figure it out. He was sure of it. He should leave. He wanted to leave. He wanted to find his dad and who else could find Will than his own son? He was sure he could do it and he desperately wanted to try. To prove that he was worth being with Will and Hannibal.

It wasn't right. It was so very wrong and that's why he had lied to Morgan about not being worthy enough to be part of Hannibal Lecter's life. He wasn't sure where the notion or want had come from and maybe it had come from all of the research to understand the man that Walter had done in the last three years, but he desperately wanted to be worthy of Hannibal Lecter.

It was twisted and maybe that was what Hannibal Lecter could do. Walter wanted to be perfect. He wanted to be as smart and as sharp as his dad was. He needed to be a part of them, he needed them. And it was a them, a packaged deal. There was no getting out of it. Everyone had their own place and their own kind and Walter only had Will Graham who had the Chesapeake Ripper.

Walter just needed to know where he fit in that. Would he fit in that? Or would he just be a burden? How could he be better? How could he prove to them that he was ready for this life, whatever this life might be? How did he show Hannibal Lecter that he was worth more than Abigail Hobbs?

There were so many other questions swirling in his mind and he wasn't sure how to hold them all back. They were blinding and loud, but he needed to stay focused and calm. He needed to stop thinking like himself and think more like his dad or maybe even Hannibal.

What would they do in this situation?

The smart thing would be to stay put and stay silent. Will and Hannibal had left him here for a reason, even if Walter didn't necessarily understand the reasoning behind it. It was most likely because he was safe here. There was money to hide him behind and both Alana and Margot didn't seem to have an issue with bending the rules and fudging the lines.

Walter's hand tightened on the strap of the backpack at the thought of the woman. Alana and Jack. They were so similar that they clashed heads. They were cold and unfeeling and only cared about the end goal, but Walter wasn't sure if he cared what had made them that way. Because Alana's exterior and interior was as cold as an icebox, but Margot was different.

There was pain in Margot's eyes. Walter could read it in her face. It was sketched into every inch of her skin. She lived through horrors that Walter was sure would match or exceed his, but she was still so kind. So sweet to him. Let him just be... him. Even if he didn't want anything to do with anyone, that was alright. She would have been a better doctor than Alana.

Walter sighed. He had to stay. As much as Walter wanted to leave, and did his body itch to be off of this blood stained property, he only knew the state that Will and Hannibal were in. He would be knocking on doors to try to find them if he could even hitch a ride up the coast.

Not to mention that Will had promised to come back. Will had promised and Walter wanted to believe that promise with all of his heart. He wanted to hold onto it because it was all that he had to hold onto. Any semblance of someone who loved him and wanted him, because Alana and Margot surely didn't want him. And what if Walter left and Will did come for him? What would Will do then? Would Will try to find him or just let him go?

Walter closed his eyes and rubbed at them tiredly with a small groan. He would stay. He had to stay right here. Even if Alana did make good on her word and got him back to his grandparents or even his aunt, Walter wouldn't stay put. He would go after Will.

With a steadying inhale, Walter made his way to his room and threw all of his things onto the floor before heading back to the kitchen. He pushed open the door to see Margot patiently sipping on her own mug of hot chocolate. She placed it on the counter and gave him a gentle grin as he took his seat back at the bar.

“I thought maybe you had gotten lost there for a moment,” she teased and Walter shrugged in answer, reaching for his cooled mug and drinking from it.

He closed his eyes with a sigh as warmth filled him from the inside out, fighting away the frost that he hadn't noticed was on his limbs. When he finally opened his eyes and set the mug aside, Margot was staring at him, waiting for him to speak. When Walter didn't, Margot prompted him as delicately as she could.

“What happened today Wally? What made you so upset?”

“They keep trying to find my dad,” Walter whispered in answer, eyes down on the counter and not meeting Margot's. He couldn't look into those eyes that reminded him of that spoiled little kid that annoyed him so much. It would only piss Walter off more. “If my dad wants to be found, he'll come out of hiding. They're just going to make him dig deeper if they keep trying to drag him back here.”

“I see,” Margot replied thoughtfully with a nod. “Did either Alana of Jack tell you exactly what the plan was?” Walter's eyes flickered up for a moment before they fell back to the counter and the young boy shook his head. “Wally, they are working very hard to try to fake your dad's death so that you all might be able to escape with no one coming after you. They're trying to give you a fresh start. Somewhere far away from police and the FBI and-"

"Murders," Walter offered with a shrug. "I know enough about Hannibal, Margot. You don't have to be sensitive. I'm not a baby."

Margot sighed and moved to the empty chair beside Walter's sitting in it and reaching out to caress the back of Walter's head. When Walter didn't move, she slowly ran her fingers through the boy's dark hair, doing her best to take the tense line out of the kid's shoulders.

"Yes," she answered softly. "Murders too." Walter glanced over and she gave him a half smile, fingers still gently playing with his hair. "They are trying to give you the best shot that they can. But first they need to speak to your dad and Hannibal so that they can figure out how to conduct with this plan. There's a lot of moving pieces and parts that need to be perfected and they can't do that without your dad and Hannibal. That is why they are trying so hard to find them."

"And I ruined it," Walter whispered in realization, head snapping up. "I'm such a fucking idiot."

"No, you're not," Margot argued back sweetly. "What happened, Wally?"

"Before we get into that, you should know that I know Morgan was recording several of our conversations."

Margot's brow rose, but she didn't look at all surprised much to Walter's shock. Instead she looked a little amused. "Did Morgan tell you?"

"After I confronted him," Walter explained with a small nod. "I know he doesn't own a phone and his pockets look ridiculous with Alana's phone in them. Not to mention that I never go anywhere near Jack while he's here and Alana keeps trying to get me to." Walter's mouth twisted unhappily at the thought. "And I'm never going to speak to that man. Nothing in this world would ever get me to speak to him."

Margot gave a thoughtful nod. "You're a smart boy, Wally. Your dad must be very proud of you."

"I wouldn't know about that." Walter snorted and shook his head. He reached out and took another drink before he sighed. "Look, I'm sure you listened to all of those records conversations too, right?"

"I've heard a fair amount of them," Margot admitted, her fingers leaving Walter's hair to caress at his cheek. "Why?"

"Then you know that Morgan told me to call my mom's phone because Hannibal had taken it."

"Oh." Margot nodded in understanding and lowered her hand to take a firm grip of Walter's shoulder. "Did you call your dad?"

Walter's mouth pulled into a frown and his chin wobbled as if he were going to cry. "I-I just wanted to know that he was coming back for me. I didn't know-I didn't know that it would hurt them until I heard Hannibal's voice."

"What did he say, Wally? Was there anything helpful?"

Walter groaned and turned away from Margot, though he didn't pull from her grip. "No. Nothing helpful. Just that they would come back for me. That's all. That's all he ever says. I'll come back. But he's not going to come back, is he?"

"He'll come back," Margot assured, squeezing into Walter's shoulder in sympathy. "Will is a very determined person. When he has a goal there is nothing that will stop him from reaching it. I should know."

Walter gave a nod and licked at his lips. "You're so sure."

"Your dad has helped me through a great many troubles in my past, Wally. He's a good man and he will come back for you."

"Even if I ruined everything?"

"You didn't ruin anything. It's just a small set back. Everything will be figured out soon. You'll see."

"Wally!" an excited voice said from the doorway to the kitchen, Morgan racing in with a large box of chicken nuggets in his hands. "Look! I found pterodactyls!"

Chapter 35

Chapter Summary

"In life and death?"

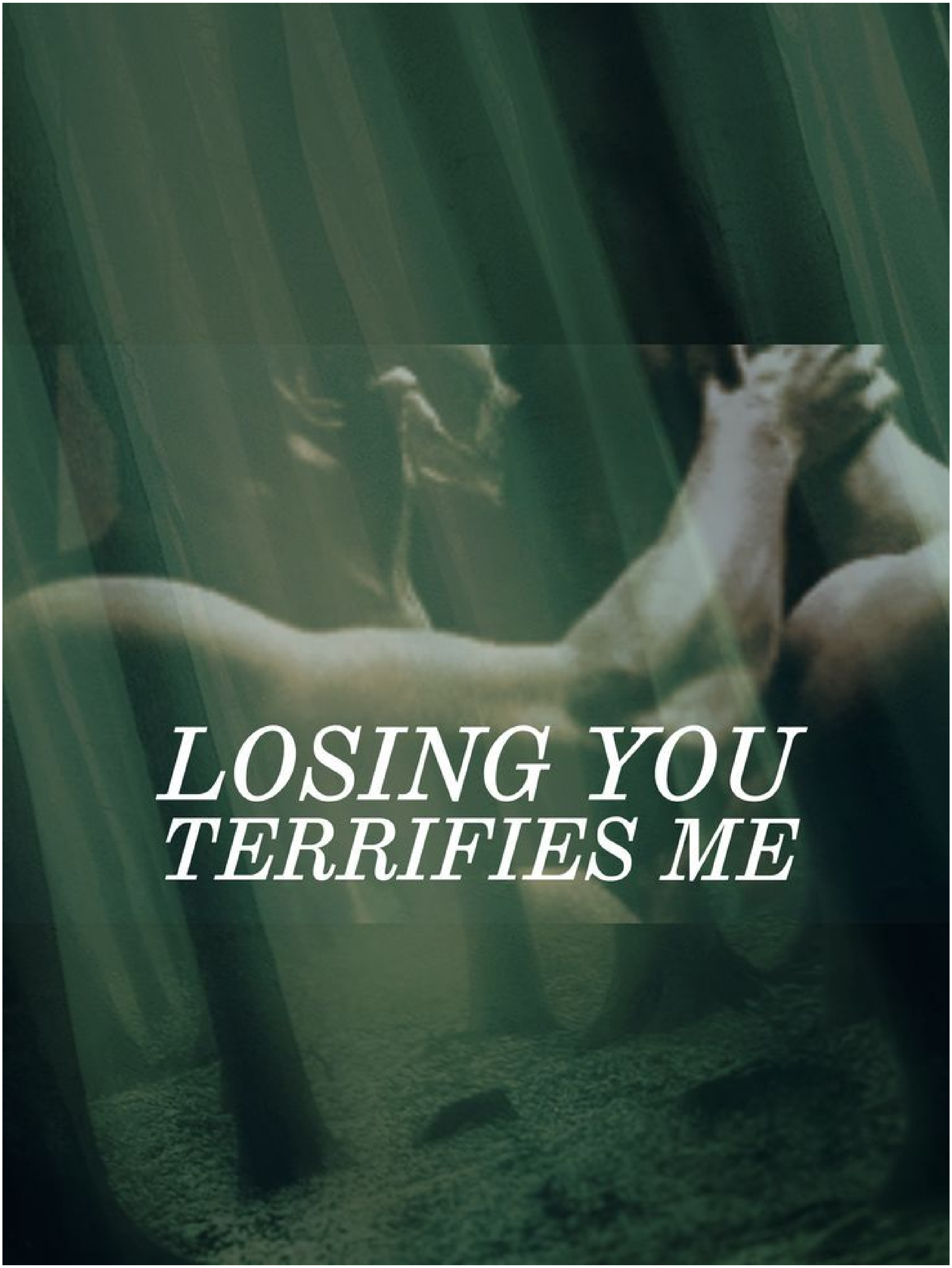
Will snorted a laugh. "Probably death."

Hannibal nodded. "Death, for sure."

Will gave another laugh and bit his bottom lip. "'Till death do us part then.”

Chapter Notes

So fun thing about this chapter. I went to go look for it and was reading it and started freaking out because a giant part of it was missing. Anywho, found it. Turns out I had written two chapter 35s and didn't see the first one. One was kinda short, so I just threw both of them together as one chapter. So you get a longer chapter this week. Wonder if you can tell where it was meant to end the first time. Hope you enjoy.


LOSING YOU
TERRIFIES ME

“We aren’t stealing a fucking car, Hannibal,” Will hissed through his teeth, pulling his coat around him in the cold that was bone numbing. He had a bag slung over his back and one in his hand with Hannibal beside him with his own pack of things.

“We aren’t walking all the way to Louisiana,” Hannibal shot back tensely through a tight jaw.

“No fucking shit, Sherlock,” Will snapped back, adjusting one of his bags. “We’ll get a rental. The police will be on us in no time if a car went missing around here.” Hannibal came to a stop and Will sighed, pausing to turn back to Hannibal who stood still for a moment longer before starting to walk again. “I didn’t mean-”

“A car has been circling the block,” Hannibal said softly. “It’s passed us three times. You haven’t noticed.”

“I was trying to think of some other reason for a car to be circling this block,” Will admitted with a huff. “Maybe they’re lost.”

“They aren’t lost,” Hannibal argued.

Will gave a small nod. “Do we see what they want or do we need to jump a fence or two?” Will glanced over Hannibal worriedly, their pace still steady. “Are you up for that kind of physical-”

“I can jump a fence Will,” Hannibal assured, tone a little softer now. “Just because...” Hannibal trailed off and Will glanced cautiously over his shoulder to the car that had been circling them. A dark Nissan that reminded Will of Eli’s car. But this one was newer and more of a grey than a back, though the only way Will could be sure was from the street lamp that the car passed under.

The car finally pulled up beside them and both Will and Hannibal stopped to face the car as the passenger side window rolled down. Will glanced once more over to Hannibal, waiting for his direction, but none came. Hannibal simply stared at the car in front of them.

“Hello boys,” a voice said. One that Will recognized only far too well. “You’ve been hard to track down.”

“Price?” Will asked, eyes wide and breath stolen from him.

“It’s a shame that it's too dark for sunglasses,” Price said with a smile, tapping his left temple as if they were sitting there for him to take. “Would have been awesome to just pull them off right then. You know like they do in-”

“CSI,” another voice called from further in the car.

“Mr. Zeller,” Hannibal muttered with a huff. He adjusted the bag over his shoulder and glanced around the night carefully. “A pleasure to see you both again.”

“No it’s not,” Zeller replied and Price gave a small laugh.

“Where do you two think you’re headed at this time of night?” Price asked again. “You look a little suspicious if I do say so myself.”

“There’s nothing suspicious about two men walking around in the middle of the night, in twenty degrees with only what they can carry on their backs,” Zeller teased back sarcastically.

“How silly of me.” Price bumped his palm against his forehead. “Of course they aren’t suspicious at all.”

“Where’s your car boys?”

Hannibal licked at his lips and looked up at the sky and Will quickly stepped forward to block the space between the car and Hannibal. Will was doing it more for the sake of Hannibal than of the FBI agents. Hannibal wouldn’t hurt them, but Will could stop the FBI from hurting his Hannibal. Even if Hannibal was an insufferable dick who Will wanted to hit right now.

“Junk yard,” Will answered, leaning over, an arm resting on the hood of the car. “Had to ditch it. Haven’t had the chance to get a new one yet.”

“It’s been three weeks,” Price pointed out, his brows furrowed in confusion. “You haven’t been able to find a car.”

“This dipshit,” Will grumbled, jabbing his thumb over his shoulder and to Hannibal, “got sick. Been at his bedside for weeks.”

“I can hear you, I hope you know,” Hannibal said in annoyance.

“That’s the point, asshole,” Will hissed, throwing a glare over his shoulder.

“Is there trouble in paradise?” Zeller asked smugly and Will’s glare turned to the driver of the car. Zeller’s hands went up defensively and he shook his head. “Was just wondering how long you went without a fight. Price and I are up to about two hours.”

“Three, if you count-”

“It’s going to be back down to one if you don’t stop right now,” Zeller warned and Will’s glare softened at Price’s dramatic huff and roll of his eyes. “Stop being such a prima donna.”

“Stop being a dick,” Price shot back, though his tone was more happy than naught. He gave Will an apologetic smile. “So where are you boys staying? We have a motel room, but it's a bit out of the way.”

“How long have you been looking for us?” Hannibal questioned, stepping a little closer to the car. Close enough that Will could feel the heat from Hannibal’s body against his back, though there was no touch.

“We’ve been in Vermont for what?” Price asked, turning in his seat to look to Zeller for help.”

“About a week. Since Alana and Jack came up with this ridiculous plan.” Zeller waved his hand boredly. “But we’ve been driving around looking for you for about-”

“Fifteen minutes.” Price turned back to Will. “You weren’t hard to spot if we’re being honest.”

“What plan?” Hannibal asked, hand resting against the small of Will’s back. Will’s eyes widened in surprise and he stole a glance at Hannibal, but the killer seemed a little more focused on the men in the car.

“Do you have a house nearby we can talk in?” Price gave a small shrug. “We can get you out of the cold and maybe we could have a drink.”

"Oh, some bourbon sounds nice," Zeller agreed with a grin.

"Who else knows that we're here?" Will asked carefully, risking a moment to let himself lean into Hannibal's grip. Hannibal hand tightened around Will's hip and there was a relief that washed through the empath at the gentleness he found there. They could apologize with words a little later.

"Just Jack. He should be here in-"

"A few hours," Zeller interrupted. "His flight got delayed though. We have time."

"Our house is a few blocks back that way," Hannibal explained, pointing the way that Will and Hannibal had been coming from. Will straightened up and glanced over Hannibal curiously, but he only received a fleeting kiss against his cold lips. "Let's get you home and warm."

"You trust them?" Will asked softly.

"Not in the slightest," Hannibal answered back with a shake of his head. "But we aren't in handcuffs yet. We play this out by ear, love."

"If you two are done flirting," Price called and Will felt a blush heat up his frozen cheeks. "Perhaps we can roll the windows back up to keep the heat from escaping into the night."

"You sound like my dad," Zeller commented with a snort. "Are we heating the whole neighborhood?"

"I am nowhere near as old as your dad," Price argued. "Just because I am ten years-"

"And we are back to an hour," Zeller grumbled with a frown. "New record."

Will chuckled and shook his head. It felt nice to have something so familiar back, even if it was these two screwballs. A bluff to hold onto in the raging storm and ocean waves.

Hannibal opened the door to the back seat and guided Will into it. Will pulled his bags from over his head and set them in the seat to his right. Hannibal slid in beside him and Will was swift to push himself into Hannibal's warmth. Hannibal adjusted slightly and closed the door before his arm wrapped around Will's shoulder to hold the empath close.

The ride back was quite save for Hannibal giving directions here and there until they were back in front of the house that they had left abandoned and smelling like sweets. Will stepped back into the house and inhaled deeply of the baking that still clung to the air, a feeling of home filling his body.

"What on earth?" Price whispered as he got a glimpse of the kitchen that they had left a mess. "Were you trying to beat the girl scout cookie sales?"

"Good God," Zeller exclaimed breathlessly.

"Help yourselves," Hannibal offered softly. "I will fetch us something to drink." Hannibal let his bags drop to the floor and he made his way over to the bar. Will followed after the man while both Zeller and Price began to stock up and the different goods that were there.

"Hannibal?" Will asked in a low voice so that it didn't carry over to the agents in the kitchen. Hannibal didn't acknowledge Will's presence, simply went about finding glasses and then poured out several fingers of amber liquid into each. "Hannibal," Will tried once more.

“What is it?”

“I love you.”

That captured Hannibal’s attention. He looked up with a crooked kind of smile and held out a glass for Will who stepped a little closer and took the offering. He took a small sip, letting the smoothness trail over his tongue.

“I love you too.” Hannibal placed a kiss on Will's head and took the two other glasses back towards the kitchen, passing them out like any good host would and offering plates for them to put all of their cookies and everything else they had grabbed on. With plates handed out, Hannibal returned to Will’s side, a hand taking his waist to lead him to the kitchen.

“I want-”

“Me too,” Hannibal assured softly, a kiss going to Will’s hair. “When Jack and the agents here are gone. But first, let's try to see what kind of plan they were talking about.”

“Thank you,” Price said and Hannibal took a seat in front of them at the dining table as Will mirrored him, helping clean some of the table so they had room to sit more comfortably. “These look amazing.”

“All of his cooking is always amazing,” Zeller corrected through a mouthful of cinnamon roll, looking absolutely delighted by the sweets. Will would have to try one before they were arrested.

“A week then?” Will started, a hand taking Hannibal’s under the table. Hannibal’s thumb rubbed soothing circles into the back of his hand.

“Tomorrow will be a week,” Zeller said.

“What took you so long?” Will asked, hoping to understand how their minds worked outside the labs. He rarely could see the two of them working as he and Jack used too, Beverly was different. Beverly was easier to deal with. One mind instead of two and a mind much more accepting of him than Zeller’s ever had been.

“We don't have you anymore… If we ever did,” Zeller said bitterly and Will blinked at the sharp change in tone. But Zeller had never really liked him. Will was sure that Zeller would still willingly believe that he was the Ripper instead of Hannibal if the option was available, apology accepted or not.

“Don't take it so hard Will,” Price quickly said as if to excuse Zeller’s behavior. “Brian sometimes doesn’t know when-”

“No, please, do. It's not about acceptance, it's about principle.” Zeller gave a shrug and bit into a chocolate chip cookie, receiving an annoyed look from Price.

“I am not following then, I am afraid,” Hannibal said kindly, not at all put off but the sharp curtness that the situation had taken. His grip stayed soft on Will’s hand and his jaw remained unclenched, much to Will’s surprise.

“Let's say that because of the lesser evil, we all believe that it is better for you to be dead.” Zeller wiped his hands on his pants and took a drink of the bourbon that had been given to him.

Hannibal's face relaxed completely and Will found himself trying to connect everything to find the meaning behind what very well could have been a threat.

“Whose idea was this?” Hannibal asked, pulling Will’s half-finished glass from Will’s hand to take his own drink.

“Alana,” Price said.

“Jack,” Zeller added, mouth turned down in a frown.

“Of course.” Will grumbled, the pieces slowly coming together. He looked between the three men and bit his bottom lip between his teeth. “So Jack looped you into this?”

“Yes,” Zeller hissed, sitting back into his chair, arms folded over his chest.

“I volunteered,” Price said with a kind smile.

“Un-volunteer,” Hannibal said shortly, finishing off Will’s glass and setting it aside.

“There’s a little too much jeopardy if I un-volunteer,” Price explained with a small shrug. “We’ve gone too far into this to back out. You should know that Jack, Alana and both of us,” -there was a sharp enunciation at *both of us* and Zeller rolled his eyes- “want to help put an end to all of this.”

“Whatever you are planning to do isn’t safe,” Will said, hand tightening on Hannibal’s. “If you are planning on doing what I think you’re doing then we are all going to be fucked.”

“It depends more on you,” Zeller sighed. “Are you ready to be an Abigail Hobbs?”

Will’s jaw tightened at the name as he let the intention to wound enter his body. Zeller’s eyes shined smugly, though his face stayed vacant. Will wanted nothing more than to tear at Zeller’s head, rip it from his neck. He had always tried so hard to be nice to the man, but was there really a need anymore? Will had sold his soul away to be with his devil, what was one more body along the way?

“Relax,” Hannibal whispered softly against Will’s temple before placing a kiss there. “No blood tonight.”

“That’s quite generous of you,” Price said with a happy smile on his mouth. “I think Brian would appreciate not dying tonight as well, if he could learn to keep his mouth shut.”

“There’s no reason I should be quiet. We have the upper hand here and it’s a necessity to the plan. I’m not sorry about the implications and yes they are all implied.” Zeller sat forward in his chair, arms folded on the table as he swirled his nearly empty glass. “Let’s be honest. The only way you two are going to get out of this is to follow this plan and which is the more realistic path to take? Sure you could kill the two of us, but what would it benefit? It would only make it harder for the two of you to get away. Pick your poison boys. I have a coin if a flip might be better.”

“Brian,” Price hissed, elbowing the dark haired man at Will’s clenched jaw. “Shut the fuck up, will you?” Price gave a nervous sort of laugh before turning back to Will and Hannibal. “Look, we’ve been working day and night to set this up. We’ve updated your DNA and prints in all of the data bases and have two bodies on standby. We set up some big thing that brings the police raining down on you and you both jump off a bridge or something. The police find your bodies, all factors match, you're dead and with new identities you two can be on your way."

"You still don't have all of the details figured out," Hannibal pointed out, not at all in question. He pulled Will's hand a little closer into his body and held it tightly.

"We were waiting to find you. We can't do everything ourselves without a willing party," Zeller pressed on. "Now, we've all put our asses on the line for you two so I suggest you take your out while it's still freely given and I never have to see either of you again."

"Nothing is freely given," Will sighed, his free hand going to his hair and ruffling through his curls. "You know we can't trust you, at all. We have no reason to believe that this won't go belly up and I personally am not going to risk-"

"Will," Hannibal scolded with a small click of his tongue that made Will fall silent and look at Hannibal with an arched brow in disbelief.

"You can't seriously be contemplating this," Will argued, voice higher pitched than he wanted it and sounding weak. "No." Will shook his head and rose to his feet. "The best thing for us to do now would be to get rid of both of them and take their car and go, Hannibal. We don't need them." Hannibal gently pulled on Will's hand, but Will shook his hand free, going to pace the room. "Can't you see that the more of us that are involved with this, the less of a chance we have of it working. It's statistics. There's too many variables to accurately determine the many outcomes. This isn't some display or art work. This is our lives."

"Will." Hannibal got to his own feet and stepped past the curious eyes that were on them from the other side of the table, waiting for their own fate to be decided. "We need to consider all possibilities."

"And if they're lying?" Will demanded, feet going to run divots in the hardwood from his pacing.

"We'd be arrested if they were lying," Hannibal offered, trying to stop Will in his pacing, but Will pushed his hands away. "Will, can I get you another drink?" Hannibal watched over Will's features carefully. He had been on edge the last few days. When Hannibal was awake to see it, Will was fretting over everything now that Eli wasn't there to assist him. It was like the world was crushing him and Hannibal hadn't had a chance to help Will sort it out. "Who's there, Will?" Hannibal could feel the surprised eyes of the agents on his back, but he ignored them. "Who wants your attention right now?"

"Molly," Will muttered, a hand fluttering to dismiss the situation. "She wants to know why I abandoned Wally."

"He's fine," Price threw out and Hannibal glanced over his shoulder with a slight glare that made Price quickly look away.

"Jack's seen him more than us though," Zeller replied, a hint of taunting in his tone.

Hannibal's jaw ticked and a snarl curled at his lip. "I would advise against speaking the rest of the night, Agent Zeller, if you so wish to keep that chatty tongue of yours in your mouth," Hannibal warned. "I would rather think that it would be more burdensome for Agent Price if I mutilated your mouth than it would be for you. I would hate to take away the only pleasure that you can give him with that tongue of yours."

There was a red heat that blossomed over the younger agent's cheeks and he licked at his lips as if he were trying to memorize how it felt in case he did lose his tongue.

"For that I am grateful, doctor," Price said, not at all disturbed by the comment as Zeller seemed to be. "But he is right. Jack is the only one who has seen Walter." Hannibal glanced over to Will as Price did his best to steer the conversation to a much safer harbor for Brian. "He said that Walter seems to be content with where he is. He gets along with Margot, but not much with Alana. Their kid seems to keep Walter company. Was Morgan his name?" Jimmy asked, his eyes going over to Brian in question.

"I just remember him being very young," Zeller answered cautiously, eyes tight on Hannibal whose lips were still curled and waiting for any reason to pounce. "But Jack said Walter was very attached to the kid. Chained at the waist is what Jack said, if I remember correctly." There was a lightness from the empath at the mention, but he did not stop his worried pacing. "We try not to associate with Alana very often. She's not quite the same person since you, Doctor. None of us really are."

"We're going back for him," Will voice said behind Hannibal and both agents watched in interest as the killer's features immediately softened.

"Of course we are," Hannibal assured, reaching out once more to stop Will's hurried movements. He took Will's shoulders and pulled the empath into his arms in a tight hug. "We will go back for him. How about we sit and clear up some more details and we'll go from there?"

"Do you want to speak with him?" Jimmy offered kindly and Hannibal could feel Will tense in his hold.

"What?" Will asked from Hannibal's chest, pushing just slightly from Hannibal's hold to look at the agents.

"We've been in contact with Margot for a while," Jimmy continued as he pulled his phone from his pocket. "It wouldn't be out of place if we were to call her."

"We are being completely serious," Zeller pushed with a firm look at both of the killers in front of him. "We want all of this to come to an end. We're all tired, all of our nerves are frayed and tempers high. I honestly think it would do you some good to speak to the kid. Maybe it would be good for him too."

Will slowly pulled himself fully from Hannibal's grip and shook his head. "Don't be ridiculous." He turned his attention to Hannibal with a worried look. "What if-"

"They can't find us much more than we have been found," Hannibal assured with a slight sigh. "Go on." He nodded his approval and a small and hesitant smile pulled at Will's lips, a hopefulness in his eyes.

Will stepped over to the table and took the outheld phone from Jimmy that was already dialing. Will put it to his ear and stepped away from the table, listening to it ring for a moment or two before it was answered with a laughing tone.

"Hello?" Margot's sweet tone asked in Will's ear and Will let out a breath that had been aching at his lungs.

"Margot," he whispered, a hand going to his head as the smile across his lips grew.

“Will?” The laugh had fallen away and was replaced with surprise. “They found you, I guess.”

“They are eating cookies and drinking bourbon in my dining room at the moment,” Will answered, voice low as he stepped a little further from the group, honestly not caring if Hannibal were to just handle them himself. Molly had quieted beside him, though her eyes were firmly set on his face as if she were waiting to hear her son’s voice on the other side of the line. And she was. She was Will after all. “Can I speak to Wally please?”

“It’s been quite an interesting night, I must warn you,” Margot admitted and Will could hear laughing grow a little louder. “Had to introduce Morgan to chicken nuggets.”

Will gave a small chuckle. “I will be forever sorry for ruining your son’s taste buds.”

“No you won’t,” Margot shot back, the hint of a smile in her voice. The next words were slightly muffled. “Wally, your dad is on the phone for you.” There was a shuffling and Will waited as patiently as he could, trying to ignore all of the eyes that were on him.

“Dad?” the young voice asked on the other side of the line and Will nearly felt like he would be knocked over at the weight that lifted from his chest.

“Wally,” he breathed out. “You’re ok? You’re alright?”

“I’m so sorry dad!” Walter said quickly in apology. “It was my fault they found you, wasn’t it? I wasn’t trying to-”

“No,” Will interrupted with a bright smile. “No, you didn’t do anything wrong Wally. I’m sorry I was so curt with you earlier. There’s been a lot of-”

“Emotions,” Walter agreed. “Dad, Margot told me what Alana and Jack were planning. Are you coming back?”

“Soon,” Will assured. “I promise, soon. We’re discussing it now.”

“Do you trust them?”

Will’s smile fell at that and he glanced back to the table where Hannibal was frowning while Price spoke, though Will couldn’t exactly make out what they were saying. “I don’t know yet, but it’s an option that I need to consider. Just promise to be good for Alana and Margot in the meantime. I’m sure what they’re dealing with is not any less stressful than what you are. They’re good friends. Please don’t give them any trouble.”

“I’ll behave. I promise.”

“Good.” Will nodded though he knew that Walter couldn’t see him. “I love you, son. I’ll see you soon. Don’t doubt me, Wally.”

“I don’t, dad,” Walter said quickly. “Dad, can I ask you something?”

“Of course,” Will answered, pacing slowly in a small space to make sure that the others still couldn’t hear his conversation.

“Do you love Hannibal?”

Will's footsteps paused and he turned back to the table, catching Hannibal's tired gaze. One that said he needed more rest and wasn't ready to be out of bed quite yet. Hannibal's lips tipped up into a side smile as if to reassure Will that everything was alright.

"Would it bother you if I did?" Will asked back, unsure of what else to exactly say. He stared at the man in front of him, the one he had given up so much for. The man that had done everything wrong in every sense of the world and had still somehow swept Will off his feet.

"I haven't come to a valid conclusion yet," Walter said after a moment's silence.

"I love Hannibal," Will said softly. "I love him very much."

"Is he going to be my dad?"

"Not if you don't want him to. I don't think that Hannibal would mind if you didn't think of him in such a way."

"You really want this to work, don't you?"

"What to work?" Will asked, running a hand nervously through his curls, eyes still stuck on maroon.

"A family with Hannibal," Wally supplied, voice light as he spoke.

"I-"

"I know that I'm not an adequate substitute for your daughter, but I can try dad."

Will felt the heat leave his body at the words. He had never once breathed out the name Abigail in front of Walter and he would never have admitted to thinking of the girl as his daughter. Not to Molly. Not to his new son. So how could he possibly know?

"Who told you that?" Will asked breathlessly.

"Hannibal."

Will bit his bottom lip, a spike of anger flooding him that he quickly put out. This wasn't the time or the place for this conversation. They had other things to deal with. Bigger things to deal with. Will could work on patching up his child once he was able to be with his child again.

"You do not have to try anything." Will closed his eyes with a sigh. "You do not get to compare yourself with her. She is nothing to either of us now, I assure you. Just a bad memory. You do not have to replace a girl who was never really there and it was wrong for Hannibal to say something like that to you."

"I can show you that I'm good enough for you. I have to."

"Why, Wally?" Will asked in desperation, body shivering with cold from Hannibal's supposed words.

"Why else would you come back for me?"

“Wally, I need you to understand that I chose you after I met Hannibal and I will continue to choose you every day. I’m not going to leave you behind, even with Hannibal. Listen to me very closely, you two are the most important people in my life and I will do whatever I need to to keep both of you.” Will gave a half smile. “Once we’re together, you are never going to be out of my sight again. Not until you go to college.”

There was a sound of dislike across the line that made Will smile more. “I don’t want to go to college, dad.”

,” Will said. “Now, make sure you stay right where you are and wait patiently for as long as it takes for me to come get you. I promise I am working every day to figure it out, it’s just a matter of time. You need to trust me.”

“Alright,” Walter agreed. “Do try to hurry though.”

“Are you bored?”

“No. Morgan won’t let me be. He bugs me to play with him all the time. He’s annoying.”

“I'm glad you have a friend.”

“He is not my friend,” Walter grumbled. “He acts like some kind of royalty. He’s a pain. And he’s always well dressed and never gets dirty, even when he eats.”

Will chuckled, feeling light. “Sounds like someone I know.”

“And he’s so nice, it’s nauseating. I can’t stand him.”

“Be kind to him. He might just be lonely. Could you imagine growing up in that big house all by yourself?”

“Surprised Alana isn’t dead.”

“Wally,” Will warned sternly, though he couldn’t let the smile drop from his lips. “Didn’t you want to have a brother at his age?”

“Dad, he could never be my brother.” There was a frown in Walter’s answer.

“Just be kind to him. Be kind to all of them.”

“Alright, dad.”

“I need to go. I promise you won’t have to wait much longer.”

“Love you dad.”

“I love you too, Wally.”

There was an off twist of amusement and anger in Will’s chest as he made his way back to the table. He passed back the phone with a thankful look, before his eyes fell to Hannibal who met his gaze in silent question.

“We need to talk,” Will muttered, his fingers tapping on the tabletop impatiently. “In private.” Will ignored the odd looks that both Price and Zeller traded, obviously on edge. Hannibal gave a small nod and rose from the table, following Will into the kitchen where Hannibal grabbed a cookie and snapped a part of it off to eat. He stayed silent, watching as Will ran a hand through his hair with a deep breath. “What did you tell Wally about Abigail?”

“I didn’t tell him anything about Abigail. He already knew,” Hannibal replied easily and Will frowned as he took another bite of cookie, anger welling up in his chest.

“Can’t you act human for two seconds?” Will demanded, knocking the cookie from Hannibal’s hand. The cookie dropped to the floor and both Zeller and Price looked back at the noise.

Hannibal straightened up with a raised brow, a look that Will knew well. A therapist waiting for their patient to explode before calmly talking them through the problems that were darkening their minds.

“I’m not your fucking patient Hannibal,” Will hissed. “Don’t give me that look, damn it. You know damn well what you said to my son.”

“Your son and I spoke of many things, Will. Did you know he learned Lithuanian just for me? Quite a charming boy you have,” Hannibal muttered, folding his arms over his chest.

Will’s train of thought stuttered to a stop for a single moment as he recalled that Walter had spoken to Hannibal in Lithuanian when they had left the boy behind. Will had nearly forgotten the conversation and his brows furrowed as it came back to him.

“What did he say to you? That night?” Will asked softly.

“He asked me to take care of you,” Hannibal answered in just as quiet a voice. “I suppose you’re asking about him being a replacement for Abigail. The words that I said were meant to hurt Molly, not the boy. I didn’t think the boy would take it personally. I’m sorry.”

“No, you’re not,” Will grumbled, folding his arms over his chest. “You’re not fucking sorry.”

“Will,” Hannibal scolded. “It pains me that you don’t believe me after we promised no more lies.”

Will’s person softened at the words and he sighed, a hand going to pinch the bridge of his nose. “You’re sorry?”

“I’m sorry,” Hannibal agreed.

“You will apologize to my son.”

“I will apologize to your son.” Hannibal gave a nod.

Will’s index finger pushed painfully into Hannibal’s chest. “I mean it Hannibal. This isn’t going to be an easy transition and I don’t need you making it any harder.”

“Of course.”

“Should we talk about details or should we call it a night?” Jimmy called over and Will sighed with a roll of his eyes.

“Do you need to sleep? You’re looking pale.” Will asked softly.

“I’m fine,” Hannibal assured. “Let's get this all figured out.”

* * *

“I...” Will trailed off, flipping through the multitudes of papers that were stern over the table, most written in Hannibal’s cursive that was a joy to look at from an art perspective but murder to try to read. “How do you have this many safe houses?”

“Should I not have safe houses?” Hannibal asked back in mock curiosity, head resting in his hand that was propped up on the table top.

“And your accounts are a bottomless pit,” Will muttered, dropping the papers in his hands before picking several others and scanning over them. “I know you come from royalty, but I didn’t think that-”

“The money I live on in my daily life was from my medical practice. I try not to touch my reserves.”

Will closed his eyes with a deep breath. “You lived that way off of your medical practice? Fuck, was I in the wrong field.” Will opened his eyes again and gave a nod, setting everything aside. “Alright. I know all of your assets, all of your account information, all of your estates and their locations. Can we please get married and run away now?”

Hannibal’s lips pulled into a slight smile. “You looked at the papers for a matter of moments each, how could you possibly know everything already?”

“I’m starting to think you don’t want to marry me, Hannibal,” Will teased with a small smile. “I have a very good memory.” Hannibal’s smile dropped at that and Will frowned with a small nod. “I... I still don’t remember everything, do I?”

“Not even close, though I am very happy with how quickly you came back to me this time.”

“What will you do if I forget you after we’re married?”

Hannibal was quiet for a long moment and Will bit his lip as the unspoken truth of the silence clawed its way into his bones. Hannibal didn’t need to say a single word for Will to understand. The emotions radiating off of the man were loud and choked the air from Will’s lungs, making his chest feel like it was going to cave in on itself.

“Do you want to get married?” Will asked softly, reaching out across the table to take Hannibal's free hand. Hannibal returned the grip, thumb gently caressing over the back of Will’s hand. “If it bothers you that much, we don’t-”

“I wouldn’t have asked you if I didn’t want it.”

“It wasn’t just the gun in your face?”

“The safety was on,” Hannibal pointed it out with a smirk. “You wouldn’t have shot me.”

“I was seriously contemplating it,” Will grumbled with a small smile of his own.

“Were you?” Hannibal questioned, eyebrows raised.

“Yeah.” Will pulled his hand free and rested back in his chair with his arms folded over his chest. He gave a shrug. “But then I remembered that I kinda liked you.”

“How utterly charming,” Hannibal snorted as he got to his feet, coming around the table and to Will’s side.

“Yeah, I don’t know,” Will continued in his teasing tone, looking up as Hannibal turned his chair so that he was facing the killer. “I mean, he’s kind of handsome, I suppose.”

Hannibal’s smile was bright and all teeth as he placed a knee to one side of Will’s legs and leaned over the chair. “Only kind of?” he asked back, hands taking the back of Will’s chair to anchor him as he leaned in a little closer to Will.

“He’s a bit of an arrogant narcissist.” Will’s nose scrunched up and he shook his head. “But his cheekbones are dangerous and his eyes make me melt.”

Hannibal hummed and nuzzled at Will’s ear with his nose. Will gave a chuckle and shifted out of Hannibal’s grip as his hair tickled his ear. “What else do you like about him?”

“Fishing for compliments, are we? I thought I was the fisherman, Dr. Lecter,” Will taunted, pushing his curls behind his ear. Hannibal only took the opportunity to press a kiss to Will’s ear. One of Will’s hands reached out and slid up and over Hannibal’s thigh, taking in the strong muscle there that was used for chasing down prey. “He has this voice that is like a lullaby. It’s sweet and powerful and relaxes me. His accent isn’t half bad either. Much more proper than my southern drawl.”

“I can find appeal in such twang,” Hannibal whispered, kissing at Will’s cheek.

“Those two are very different.” Will gave a small chuckle and Hannibal rolled his eyes. “For someone who cares about the specifics in everything, you don’t seem to think that different accents in the states means a lot.”

“You stopped being cute when you corrected me,” Hannibal grumbled, though he didn’t leave Will, he moved closer and Will turned his face to steal a kiss from Hannibal with a light moan. His hand snatched out and grabbed the fabric of Hannibal’s sweater and pulled him closer until Hannibal was straddling Will’s lap at the kitchen table.

“I was cute?”

“Maybe at one time,” Hannibal answered between the frantic kisses that Will was placing to his lips. “What’s the difference?”

“Between a twang and a drawl?” Will asked, letting his voice slip into that silky sound, his vowels lengthened and the rest of the words relaxed in their pronunciation. “Now, Dr. Lecter. Do you really need someone such as me to educate you?” Hannibal closed his eyes at the words and nodded, feeling a little dizzy as the sound graced his ears. A sound that Hannibal was certain only Will let him hear after how long he had been trying to stave off the accent his whole life. “A drawl is from the deep south. It drops the harsh R sounds and is more fluid and drawn out, it’s much slower. Like a lazy summer afternoon with sweet iced tea after a long day of fishing in the bayou. A twang belongs to more of the western south.” Will’s nails scraped over Hannibal’s thighs through his slacks and Hannibal’s body grew weak against him. Will smiled, doing his best to keep the accent bright in his voice as he continued to speak. “Think Oklahoma and Texas. A twang is harsher and nasally, you break the vowels up and monophthongs turn into diphthongs. Country music is usually more of a twang than a drawl."

"Don't stop," Hannibal whispered, kissing at Will's neck. Hannibal sighed. "Please don't stop talking."

"You like my gross accent that much?" Will asked with a chuckle, leaning his head back to let Hannibal have better access to his throat. Hannibal hummed in answer with a light nip at Will's collar. "What should I talk about?"

"Where is my safe house in Amsterdam?" Hannibal asked softly.

"In the country, outside of Monnickendam," Will answered in his accent, letting Hannibal's fingers pull at the buttons on his shirt. "We are a married couple, tired of city life. You are a pastry chef and I am a boat mechanic. We both own small shops in town."

"And in Argentina?"

"We have a place in La Plata outside of Buenos Aires. You are a stay at home dad and I am a dog walker. That one actually sounds rather pleasant."

"Does it? I did try to come up with things that you would enjoy doing."

"Because you know me so well," Will whispered with a sigh as Hannibal's tongue traced back up his neck and to the dip below his ear. Hannibal sucked on the sensitive skin and Will let out an involuntary groan.

"Intimately," Hannibal whispered, breath hot against Will's skin. "Last one, Will. What about my house in Japan?"

"You don't have a house in Japan, though I wouldn't be opposed to seeing it at some time. Maybe pay respects to your aunt."

"My aunt?" Hannibal asked curiously, a smile in his voice.

"She was from Japan, wasn't she?"

"Of all of the things you can remember," Hannibal muttered with an almost sad sort of sigh. Will was about to ask what Hannibal wished he remembered, but before he could get a word out, Hannibal continued on. "I'll marry you now, Will. We'll get your son the next day and head to Europe. Where would you like to go first?"

"I would love to see Germany," Will answered. "That gothic home sounds lovely."

"The one in Monschau, North Rhine-Westphalia?" Hannibal pulled back with a small smirk. "I thought for sure you would have said the villa in Venice."

"After," Will said with a bright smile. "I've already been to Italy, though I don't have much memory of it. We'll see it again after I see something new with you. Something that I won't forget."

"As you wish, *mano meilė*."

“They’re going through with it?” Jack asked, looking up from where his head had been hidden in his hands. His eyes were wide as he looked between Jimmy and Brian who stood in front of his desk for the first time in about a week.

“Absolutely,” Price answered with a smile.

“Good riddance,” Zeller grumbled under his breath, receiving a sharp elbow to the ribs from the older man beside him. “What? The sooner they’re gone, the sooner we can focus on other cases that are far more important than some murder freaks who love each other.”

“You really hate them that much?”

“They were in on it the whole time. Will knew the entire time and did nothing,” Zeller answered.

“He told us, and we ignored him,” Jack pointed out.

“Not that. He was helping Lecter the entire time. You can’t begin to think that he was innocent through all of this. You saw the way he strung up that Tier guy. He didn’t have any issues with the crime scene like he normally did. He was getting off on it. It was all a game to him. A play.”

“You can’t be serious,” Price said back harshly. “You know exactly why he did that.”

“He was flirting with the cannibal!” Zeller shot back.

“Boys, please,” Jack muttered with a deep sigh, a pain filling his shoulders at the weight of the conversation. “When are we going to finish all preparations?”

“They said that they had something important to do first before we set everything in motion,” Price replied.

Zeller gave a huff and folded his arms over his chest. “They promised it had nothing to do with killing someone, but who the hell could possibly know with them?”

“And when is this event supposed to take place?” Jack asked softly.

“This Friday, supposedly. They want to pick up the boy on Saturday,” Price answered. “Do you think that they will have more cookies left over from-”

“They were really good cookies,” Zeller admitted softly.

“Cookies?” Jack looked between both men again and waved his hand, dismissing the question. He wasn’t sure if he could deal with the idea that they had once more partook in Hannibal’s cooking when they knew exactly what he did to the bodies he mutilated. “So we aim for Saturday.”

"One of the other benefits of getting married is that you can't testify against me in court."

Will gave a loud laugh as he buttoned up his dress shirt. Nothing too nice, just something to look presentable. "And here I thought you were marrying me because you loved me."

"I do love you," Hannibal assured, straightening his tie in the mirror. "This is just a bonus."

Will laughed again. "Or is it because you don't want me to have the option to run off on you again for another three years."

"That could be another contributing factor," Hannibal admitted, looking at Will in the mirror who was straightening his shirt collar, though he left the tie untouched.

Will pulled on his suit coat and turned with curls tamed and brushed back, causing Hannibal's gut to twist with fingers dying to mess them up. Hannibal grabbed his vest and pulled it on, buttoning it up with a deep breath.

"Is something upsetting you?" Will asked curiously, stepping closer to Hannibal who shook his head and grabbed his own suit coat.

"No, no," he said quickly, pulling on the coat.

"Just nervous," Will agreed without Hannibal needing to say the words. There was a lot riding on this. Will would be a fool to think that there was not. This was a step that he was ready to make, but one that he had seen Hannibal slowly struggling with and how could Will blame the man? After everything that they had done to each other over the years, he was surprised that Hannibal had even asked for his hand in the first place. Will could disappear in a moment’s notice. Mentally or physically. He had done it before, why should Hannibal expect the future to be any different?

"Are you ready?" Hannibal asked as he buttoned up the front of the coat, eyes looking over Will once more, dressed far more casually than Hannibal, but nothing that Hannibal would change. Black slacks that hugged Will just right. White dress shirt unbuttoned and open at the top and suit coat open, but still clinging to Will like he had been poured into it.

"Ready as I'll ever be," Will answered with a nod, taking Hannibal's outstretched hand.

Hannibal pulled Will close, giving the empath a quick kiss. "For better or worse?" he asked in a whisper, arm wrapping around Will’s waist. "In life and death?"

Will snorted a laugh. "Probably death."

Hannibal nodded. "Death, for sure."

Will gave another laugh and bit his bottom lip. "'Till death do us part then.”

“Death could never separate us,” Hannibal whispered, pressing another kiss to Will’s lips. He could feel Will’s hand reach into his coat and slip under his vest, pressing just over his heart that was racing in his chest. “Still only for you,” Hannibal assured softly, resting his forehead against Will’s. “It never does this for anyone else.”

“I hope it never stops doing this. I don’t know what I would do.” Will licked at his lips and pulled back with a deep breath. “You’re sure this is what you want? We can just say we did.”

“Darling boy,” Hannibal chastised gently, fighting the desperate urge to run his fingers through Will’s curls. There would be time for that later. “I would not be standing here with you if my intentions were not clear cut.”

Will gave a small nod, but Hannibal could see the same nervousness in Will’s features that had been there the last few days. The same fear that had been in Hannibal’s own veins. The uncertainty of the future and with Will, it would be absolutely uncertain. Will had always been unpredictable. Hannibal could determine the outcome of any other aspect of his life with absolute certainty, but Will was an entirely different beast.

Hannibal released the boy, save for one of Will's well worked, calloused hands and pulled Will with him from the small dressing room in the church. It wouldn't be anything big. No one but them and the priest that Hannibal had paid off quite handsomely.

The chapel of the church was nothing too elaborate, something small just for Will because Hannibal knew that Will wouldn't like the fuss. Knew that the more private the better it would be. It would calm the empath's anxieties long enough that they could get through the act. It was all formalities anyways. Some ritual that didn't need to be done for Hannibal to show how much he worshiped Will, but one that he knew meant the absolute world to Will.

The ceremony was short, sweet and very to the point, surprising Will as much as the size of the church had. He had thought that they would have been in for some elaborate ornate thing from one of Hannibal's artistic whims, but was pleasantly taken aback by the simplicity. The thought was touching and made Will choke up in a way he hadn't with Molly.

"Please exchange the rings," the priest said, motioning between the two of them. "I believe you said you had your own vows?"

Hannibal gave a small nod and reached into his pocket, pulling a silver band with a white inlay in it free from his pocket. Will looked over it carefully. Of course the ring would be something unusual. A slight smile pulled at his lips and he tried to keep from rolling his eyes as he tried to guess what was the inlay in the ring. It wouldn't be anything simple. It never was with Hannibal.

Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue.

That ridiculous poem was something Hannibal would pull from, Will had no doubt. So what was something old made to something new? It would no doubt be something borrowed, though Will wasn't sure where the blue came in.

Will looked a little closer as the ring was slowly slid onto his finger, something so familiar about the color and the material there. Something that he had seen multitudes of times. Something that he had touched and tasted before as well. Bone.

But it wouldn't be just any one person's bone. Hannibal was a sentimental bastard as it was. Maybe it belonged to Dollarhyde. Their first kill together would always be momentous, but unless Hannibal had gone back to collect, Will doubted it. It could have been Teir's, Will's first official kill under Hannibal's careful hand. But he had been there the entire time with Hannibal while he displayed the man, once more under Hannibal's careful instruction. Hannibal hadn't touched the man.

Will was nearly at a loss for whose it belonged to before it finally came to him. It was his own bones. Ones that had once belonged to Hannibal, ones that he would have kept due to some sick perversion, though there was no use to hold onto such a thing. His own finger was in this ring, his nearly almost husband forever to be close to his skin, forever with him even if they were apart and Will couldn't stop the endearing that welled up in his chest.

"I commit myself," Hannibal whispered so low that Will knew he was the only one who could hear his words, "to spend the rest of my days making yours as beautiful and complete as you have made mine since the day I met you, for you are the reflection of my very soul. A reflection of a part that I had lost many years ago and was gone until you gave it back to me. No lies, no secrets, no laws and not even death will keep me apart from you for you and I are one."

Will smiled with a small huff of air. He cleared his throat to try to keep his mouth from going dry as Hannibal's simple but powerful words shook him to his very core. Words that didn't need to be flowery and large to hold a world of meaning within them.

With a trembling in his hands that he couldn't stop, Will reached into his own pocket and cursed the simple silver band that he had picked out, unsure if anything else would have fit Hannibal quite like the gentleness of sterling against tanned skin.

Will licked at his lips as his mind struggled to try to pull together some semblance of language for him to speak. He stared at the back of Hannibal's hand, eyes following the lines in his skin before he slid the ring onto Hannibal's finger, something sharp and stabbing in his chest at how real this felt all of a sudden.

"From this moment I give my whole self to you," Will whispered, grateful that his voice wasn't cracking with the way that it felt like it would, "to respect you, honor you and cherish all of the life that you and I are about to create for ourselves and the family we are going to be. I promise you that I will always do my best to find my way to you," -Will hoped that Hannibal knew exactly what Will meant and the small tip of Hannibal's lips told Will he did. Will would always find him, whether his mind was on fire, being carved out with a saw or being wiped clean again and again. He would find Hannibal- "for I cannot be myself without you because you are the most beautiful and truest part of myself. I cannot live without you because I know that I can be more with you than I have ever been apart from you."

"I pronounce you husbands. You may kiss," the priest said, the book he had been holding, closing with a slight snap.

"I love you," Hannibal whispered.

"I love you too." Will pulled Hannibal close to him and was greeted with lips against his, something so much more powerful about this kiss with the weight of everything that had happened between them in it. The priest's footsteps echoed away, but neither of them cared much, happily tangled up in each other.

Will wasn't sure how long they were there, but sirens were what brought him back to himself. He broke the kiss, breathing hard. Both he and Hannibal glanced towards the closed doors of the church, reds and blues pouring through the ornate stained glass windows and Will sighed.

"Paid him enough, did you?" Will teased, pulling himself from Hannibal and reaching into the back of his waistline to pull his gun free. "Will he be your next display?"

"Only if you deem it a worthy cause," Hannibal answered, a smile on his lips as Will checked to make sure his gun was loaded before switching off the safety and pulling back the hammer on it with a click. "You're going to kill officers, Mr. Lecter?"

"It's self-defense," Will muttered, eyes darting up as the locked door at the back of the church was kicked, no warning given out, not that one needed to be given for Will and Hannibal to know exactly who they were. "How do we get out of here, Dr. Lecter?"

“Come with me,” Hannibal said, taking Will’s hand and pulling him up and behind the pews. There was another kick and a cracking sound as the wood finally splintered and gave way for the officers to enter the room. There were at least a dozen men that spilled into the church and a gun went off. Some of the rock wall by Will’s head shattered into dust and Will came to a stop, his own gun going off. There was a groan from one of the officers and one dropped to the ground, a hand clutching his shoulder. “Will,” Hannibal called, holding a door open and Will raced after Hannibal.

The door was closed behind them and Will grabbed a chair from around a rectangular table and used it to shove under the door handle. Will’s arm was snatched up and he was wheeled around for a quick kiss from Hannibal before he was pulled along and to where a window was, glass sparkling with the picture of Mary, one of many throughout the church.

“Gun,” Hannibal instructed, holding out his hand. There was a loud smash at the door and the chair behind them creaked and groaned at the pressure that was put on it. Will passed Hannibal the gun, who went for the window and used the butt of the gun to smash at the glass. Will stared as the carefully made art was turned to nothing more than colored shards.

“You-You just-”

“We don’t have time to contemplate the artistry that was put into this building, Will. Another time, maybe.” Hannibal gave a chuckle and passed the gun back into Will’s empty hand while he stripped himself of his suit coat. Will glanced over his shoulder at another loud smash at the door, the wood cracking at the brute force. Hannibal draped his coat over the edge of the window and turned back. “Will, come along.”

Will moved over to the window and glanced out at the drop. Nothing too high. He threw a leg over the edge and then the other before letting himself fall the few feet to the ground, ducking behind the bush that was there and waiting for Hannibal to join him.

Hannibal was quickly by his side and he snatched up Will’s hand once more, pulling him from the bush and through the small graveyard that was on the property, headstones tripping Will up once or twice as he tried to keep up with Hannibal’s impressive pace.

“They didn’t surround the church?” Will questioned curiously as they hit the sidewalk and raced down it, pushing through people. “Seems like an under sight.”

“Cocky?” Hannibal asked.

“Possibly.”

Will gave a small laugh as Hannibal tugged him around a corner of the street and they continued on. If this was going to be their life, Will knew it absolutely wouldn’t be boring. There was no way it would be boring if they were on the run from the police and there were corrupt people ready to turn them in with a new fat wad of cash in their wallets.

There were more lights up ahead and Will quickly pulled Hannibal across the street and through oncoming traffic. “This way,” he called over his shoulder, dropping Hannibal’s hand so they could run easier as they dashed between two buildings that were huddled closely together. “We just had to come back to Baltimore, didn’t we?”

“You weren’t complaining earlier. We are closer to your son.”

Will just laughed, coming to a halt as another police cruiser with lights and sirens blaring sped down the street. Hannibal led the way in the opposite direction and Will followed after him, their pace a little slower now. Somewhere much closer to a natural walk than a sprint.

"Where to now?" Will questioned, glancing at the street behind them before he followed Hannibal across the road. "You know this city better than I do." Hannibal just shot Will a knowing look and Will gave a heavy sigh as they faded back behind another building. "You knew he was going to tell, didn't you?"

"I had my suspicions," Hannibal admitted with a grin. "You have to admit that it made everything a bit more exciting."

"Yeah, exciting isn't the word I would have used." Will rolled his eyes and stopped as he was pressed up against one of the buildings, Hannibal's body tight against his. One of Hannibal's hands took Will's wrist and slipped under the cuff of his dress shirt, taking his pulse.

"Rather steady for a man who just shot an officer," Hannibal teased, nuzzling his nose against Will's.

"He almost hit me. I was just returning the favor," Will whispered, pushing forward to kiss his husband. "We're married, Hannibal."

Hannibal laughed at the dreamy way the words were uttered. "I think we are, Mr. Lecter."

"God," Will groaned, hands tight on Hannibal's hips, tugging the man somehow closer. "That sounds so much better than Graham. Graham ruins too many marriages."

Will received another kiss, but it didn't last quite as long as he wanted it to before the sound of sirens brought the two of them back to themselves.

"Come along, darling husband," Hannibal muttered with a kiss to Will's cheek. "We're not far from our room."

"You got us a room?" Will asked curiously, following the man once he was released.

"Maybe more than a room. I was not about to spend our wedding night hiding out under some bridge while the cops look for us," Hannibal explained, offended in his tone at the indignity of what he had just mentioned.

Will snorted his laughter. "Fucking me under a bridge wouldn't be your idea of fun?"

"I'm not a heathen, Will."

Will only shook his head and broke into a sprint after Hannibal when a *hey you* was shouted from an officer across the street.

Hannibal stopped Will at the edge of a street where the tall office buildings had started to give way to smaller houses. Quaint little things that were cookie cutter and simple, but nonetheless pretty to look at.

Hannibal glanced around to double check no one saw them before he headed up the front steps of one, Will's hand in his. Will quickly tucked the gun back into his waistline and dress pants as Hannibal unlocked the front door, guiding Will inside.

Will glanced around the modest estate in curiosity. Yet again, something far more simple than Will had been expecting. Something that reminded him of a farmhouse in the middle of the large city, a small escape from the sirens that were still ever prominent outside and would be the rest of the night. But Will could get used to the sound, used to the way his blood raced each time a police cruiser passed this house.

Will pulled his suit coat from his shoulders and tossed it over the back of a couch, stepping into the small living room that had a cozy sort of feel to it. There was a fireplace with wood beside it and Will gave a small smile.

“Was dinner part of the plan?” Will asked softly.

“I’m sure that it could be arranged,” Hannibal stated, voice just as soft though Will wasn’t sure if both of them just didn’t want to break the mood they had set or if they spoke any louder then all of the Baltimore police department would know exactly where they were. “What are you in the mood for, my love?”

Will snickered as a hand was slid around his back until it found the gun and pulled it free from the back of his pants with a disapproving look. “You knew they were going to come after us and you’re upset with me because I had the good sense to bring a weapon to our wedding?”

Hannibal’s look turned from one of disapproval to something a bit more relaxed with a roll of his eyes. “It’s not very classy, Will.”

“There was nothing classy about what we just did, Hannibal.” Will gave another laugh and pulled the gun from Hannibal’s hand, placing it aside on the table by the couch. “Though, it is something that I won’t be forgetting anytime soon.”

“*Tikiuosi, kad taip, mano meile.*” Hannibal’s hand slid over Will’s cheek and Will pressed a kiss into Hannibal’s palm. “How about you make a fire and I’ll get some drinks and make something to eat?”

“Alright,” Will answered, nuzzling his face into Hannibal’s hand, his own hands circling around Hannibal’s wrist to keep the man right there where he was. He placed another deep kiss to Hannibal’s palm and inhaled deeply, eyes closing as he stepped closer to Hannibal. “Thank you.”

“Whatever for, love?” Hannibal questioned, arm circling Will’s waist to pull his body flush against his own, something so utterly intimate about the closeness of the moment.

“For just being so perfectly you.”

“And I’m the one who’s the romantic sap?” Hannibal teased, voice barely above a whisper as he pressed a soft kiss to Will’s lips. Will returned the kiss eagerly, throwing his arms around Hannibal’s neck, soft and needy sounds coming from his throat as another round of sirens rang through the house.

“Hannibal,” Will groaned against the man’s mouth. “I want you.”

“I’m right here.”

“More.”

Hannibal broke the kiss with a small chuckle and Will frowned, trying to pull Hannibal back. “Let’s have dinner first, silly boy. Rest for a moment from the run. I promise the adrenaline won’t leave you that quickly.” Will groaned in protest, but Hannibal simply detangled the empath from himself. “Make a fire my love. I promise something simple tonight that won’t take too long to make.”

With fire made and wine drank, probably more than what should have been, and a lovely beef stew eaten that reminded Will of a very cold night in front of a hurried fire and wrapped in numerous blankets with a shivering Hannibal, though he wasn’t truly certain where the image came from, but it must have been real because he recognized the cabin, Will rested himself against Hannibal on the couch.

A hand played with his curls while Hannibal finished off his glass of wine. As soon as the glass was empty, Will was swift to pull the glass from Hannibal’s hand and straddled the man, glass discarded to the coffee table.

Will tangled his hands into Hannibal’s silky hair and kissed at Hannibal’s sharp cheekbones. “I’ve played your game, Hannibal. We had dinner and wine and there’s a fire. I want my husband now,” Will whispered as he continued to kiss every inch of Hannibal’s face he could. “I want him to rip me to pieces and leave me begging. Please.”

Hannibal inhaled deeply and frowned as he put thought into Will’s scent, something so awfully familiar in the aftershave he wore. Something from when they had first met. Something that he had used to distract from the painful realization that his friend was suffering with an illness, before the idea to watch everything play out took hold. Something with a ship on the bottle.

“I waited three years for you and you came to me smelling like horrendous aftershave, that house and her. You still smell like one of those things, even now,” Hannibal grumbled in disgust.

“Then fix it, Dr. Lecter. I can’t do everything myself,” Will teased, pressing a heated kiss to Hannibal’s neck. “In my defense, I was trying to catch a murderer, not reading your love letters. Don’t be too hard on me.” He wasn’t exactly sure where he pulled the words from, but they were the truth. Hannibal had written him love letters while they were apart, though Will couldn’t be sure exactly where Hannibal had gone, just that Will was with Molly when he received the letters.

“You read all of my letters, didn’t you?” Hannibal asked curiously before snatching up Will’s lips hungrily. “Even if you didn’t answer.”

“When I couldn’t sleep,” Will admitted through bruised and busy lips. “I hid them in my dresser and at night when I couldn’t sleep I would sneak away to read them before burning them so Molly wouldn’t know.”

But she knew. She had always known. Sometimes after nightmares she would ask if he needed to go and read those letters. He wouldn’t come back to bed after that. He couldn’t sleep after pouring over the drawings that Will had received from Hannibal, reading and rereading Hannibal’s words before the words were turned to ash. Though the drawings were always kept. Treasured and saved away in his drawer in his dresser, under his socks.

“Naughty boy.”

“You have no idea what your words do to me, Hannibal.”

“What were your favorite?” Hannibal asked softly, voice barely there, lost in the air between their lips, being eaten up by Will’s kiss.

“You’re so delicious as a concept, but as a person I worry about you,” Will replied. “And let’s not forget that you fucked Alana. And you married Bedelia.”

“An alibi in both cases, I assure you. But you kissed Alana, lest we forget.” Hannibal pulled back with a lazy smile and a sigh. “And I can’t have that.”

“You’re being possessive, Dr. Lecter.”

“You belong to me, Will. No one else.”

“My mind has always been yours,” Will whispered, nuzzling his forehead against Hannibal’s, arms locked around the man’s neck. “You still have no idea what your words did to me. After every letter I would dream of you if I could put the letter down and sleep. Sometimes I would read them over and over for hours on end.”

“What about?”

Will licked at his lips and crawled a little closer to Hannibal from where he straddled his lap. “You and me in compromising positions. Calling your name, Dr. Lecter.”

“I hope you didn’t use such formal terms,” Hannibal teased, stealing a quick kiss. “Compromising positions?”

Will sighed exasperatedly, eyes dark with lust as he stared at Hannibal from under his lashes. “You know damn well what I mean.”

“I’m afraid I don’t.”

It was bait and Will rose to it so readily. “Sex dreams, Dr. Lecter. You and me in cars and bar bathrooms and hotel rooms. Filthy, dirty, hot, sweaty sex.” Will could feel the way that Hannibal shifted under him embarrassedly and it made Will smile. Maybe Hannibal hadn’t expected for the fish to fight against the hook that he had so lazily cast. “Me shoved up against the wall of a bathroom stall, your tie shoved into my mouth to keep me quiet as you pound into me.”

Hannibal looked away, a blush on his cheeks and cleared his throat. “Does that bother you, Dr. Lecter?” Will teased smugly. Hannibal gave a minute shake of his head. “Me giving you a blowjob while you drive until you have to pull over, unable to focus and I ride you until you come undone under me.” There was a strangled sort of sound that came from Hannibal’s lips and Will laughed. “Desperate kissing in the elevator, obscene noises that make others uncomfortable as you shove me to our room, undressing me in the hall while I struggle to get the door unlocked. You pick me up and carry me into the room, trapping me to the bed. The room is destroyed by the time we’re done. People are upset from the headboard hitting the wall because I have to cling to it so I don’t fall over. There’s dents in the wall now.”

“*Mano geras berniukas*,” Hannibal breathed out. “*Ar visada buvote tokia purvina?*”

“English, Dr. Lecter,” Will ordered, nipping at Hannibal’s lips as his hips ground down on Hannibal’s. Hannibal bit his lips with a groan and Will only smiled. “Come on, what did you say, Dr. Lecter? Focus for me.”

“Lascivious boy,” Hannibal scolded, though his voice lacked the commitment.

“Please, doctor. Proceed.”

Hannibal simply smiled, a hand brushing a curl from Will’s face. Hannibal had never believed that the day of his wedding would come, having grown absolutely content with the idea of being alone, of having to live life among the mundane and the tediousness of normal people. He had come to the conclusion that there would never be another person out there that understood him, saw him, accepted him for what he was and then this stuttering, socially inept man stumbled ungracefully into his life.

The world was immediately brighter with the empath in it. Someone just as weird, unstable and pained as he was. Someone just as trapped in his own skin and mind. Then came that one person who understood, who no longer judged, accepted him for what he really was, and didn’t run from the darkness inside of his heart, but stood firm just like God among mortals.

Finally there was someone who gave Hannibal a sense of comfort, who calmed the storm raging inside of his mind too often, someone who was able to look beneath his eyes and see the vastness of his bare soul. Just trusting that person wouldn't be enough, it would be too simple. Had been far too simple.

That trust turned to a love so fierce that it forgave even the most gruesome betrayal from that person, just as long as there was still love for him in those cold actions. A love so consuming, so intimate, so powerful, so dangerous. A love that transformed his whole being in a way he didn't even expect to ever happen, not in his wildest dreams.

But it was real and he could see in those Botticelli blue eyes of Will’s just how real all of it was. He wasn’t sure if there was any other moment in his life that he wanted to hold onto quite like this moment. A moment where he felt so completely connected to another person that not even the threat of being found and separated worried him. He had to hold onto this moment. He had to remember this moment forever, so he burned it into his memory, seared it into his mind palace, and branded it into his very being to enjoy this moment he had committed to for the rest of his life and into death.

He cupped Will’s cheek and kissed the boy, soft and slowly, knowing it wouldn’t last. This moment would be over just as quickly as it had begun, just as they always were. Moments left as precious indents in his head. He just hoped that Will understood exactly what was swirling through his chest, but Hannibal wasn’t quite sure he could put a name to it. It was just real and he was entirely terrified that Will would disappear as he had before and all that Hannibal would be left with were these memories, these small, precious and stolen moments.

“I’m here,” Will assured as he broke the kiss, hands tangling into Hannibal’s hair. The emotions coming off the man were screaming through Will’s being, an avalanche that was stronger than anything else Will had ever felt roll off the man before, though it was similar to something else that Will had felt, but he couldn’t place where. A cliff side, possibly with an ocean view. “I’m right here, Hannibal.”

“I will make you stay, I promise,” Hannibal assured softly.

“Dr. Lecter?”

“Yes, Will?”

“Make it rude.”

Will could feel the air shift immediately and all of the tenderness was gone, the fear of being ripped open and found unsightly dissipating as Hannibal’s dark strength enveloped him completely, making him dizzy. Will supposed he could have felt fear, but the drumming from his heart was excitement at the need to feel his beast and Hannibal giving into the want so completely as he kissed Will in a punishing manner.

Hannibal was his monster now until the end of the earth and Will realized that it hadn’t started that day. It had started long ago, but now Will could see it, finally feel it as he had dreamt of it even when he couldn’t remember the man or his face or his name. The feeling had always been there though. That first time so utterly gentle in the love making and again when his back was left with teeth marks down it for weeks. What was Hannibal going to leave him with this time? Whatever it was, he hoped that it stayed tattooed into his skin.

There was a devastatingly strong bite to Will’s bottom lip and he cried as copper filled his mouth only to be licked away by Hannibal’s smoldering tongue that was paradise. Fingers scrambled to remove clothes, buttons being ignored and torn open, expensive suits turned to nothing but rags until they were skin against skin, finally together in every way that they could be and it brought a peace to Will’s mind.

Will sighed as Hannibal sucked on his bottom lip and licked once more at the broken skin before releasing it. “Hannibal,” Will gasped out, voice gravelly.

“Hush,” Hannibal shushed harshly, a thumb reaching up to brush away the crimson that dripped down Will’s chin. He brought his thumb to his mouth and licked the salt from his finger as he had so long ago when he had left his blood on Will’s lure.

“No,” Will argued weakly, pulling at Hannibal’s belt. “I need-I want...” Will trailed off as the leather was pulled free and tossed aside.

“What is it?” Hannibal demanded impatiently and Will jumped as he was picked up, legs wrapped tightly around Hannibal’s hips as Hannibal stepped from the living room, kissing Will once more, lips swollen and bloodied. A door was opened and then kicked closed with Hannibal’s foot, but Will was too wrapped up in his husband too much to care where he had been taken. It could be Hannibal’s murder room and he could be placed on the surgical table and that would be just fine.

“You are...” Will couldn’t help the whine that left him as his back was shoved up against a wall and his hands were trapped over his head with a single strong hand. The other wrapped around his neck with a brutal grasp and Will could feel his airway constrict until white danced across his vision. The grip around him loosened and Will inhaled deeply, mind coming back online as his ear was snatched up with teeth. A moan filled the room and Will’s eyes rolled back. “You’re going to eat me, aren’t you?” Will finally got out, his train of thought finally back on its track, though he was sure he would be losing it again shortly as Hannibal’s threatening grip around his throat once more began to tighten. “You said...” Will inhaled deeply once more before the air was lost to him again. “You won’t kill me, but you’ll eat me.”

“Does that bother you?” Hannibal asked, breath fire against Will’s ear. There was no answer though, just the exhale that Will couldn’t hold onto as his breathing stopped again. Hannibal watched Will’s face carefully, giving Will a moment or two to live in the breathlessness before he let the empath have air once more. There was something gorgeous in the way the color returned to Will’s cheeks and the light to those blue eyes as his blood rushed beneath Hannibal’s palm.

“I think-” Will was cut off by a savage kiss, hips grinding up against him and Will couldn’t escape as his body was pressed further into the wall. His mind swam with the words he was trying to say, unashamed in what they entailed, unafraid in the permission that he was about to give to Hannibal. “I want it too, but...” Will bit his bottom lip that thudded dully with pain and still tasted of copper. Hannibal stopped, breathing just as hard as Will, eyes scanning the empath’s face for any chance that the words were a lie. “I want a taste of you too if you are going to do that to me.”

Hannibal’s lips broke into a smile, some semblance of a person slipping back into his eyes, though the hunger of the beast lied directly beneath them. “Are you sure?”

“Only if we do it together,” Will insisted with a nod of his head that was still very much trapped in Hannibal’s unforgiving grip. “Otherwise I wouldn’t.”

“You would go that far for me?”

“Only with you would it be beautiful,” Will whispered.

Will watched the hunger retake Hannibal’s maroon gaze and the grip around his neck returned once more, something far more forceful than it had been. Will choked on nothing and even when the white faded across his vision, air didn’t return to him.

Hannibal watched as Will’s face paled, his pulse quickening beneath Hannibal’s palm as it struggled to move absent oxygen through Will’s body. Will’s body quickly went limp and Hannibal released his hold, carrying Will over to the bed, laying the empath down on the duvet.

It wasn’t often that Hannibal gave into his baser needs. It wasn’t often that Hannibal let his full restraint be lost to him, but he couldn’t seem to fight the chemical’s that were spreading through his veins like liquid fire. He only saw what he needed, what he wanted without regard to anyone else.

He stripped Will the rest of the way only to take note of the boy’s breathing, to make sure that he was alright underneath the rings of blue and purple that were already beginning to form from Hannibal’s unkind hold.

With enough wherewithal to not destroy his meal, Hannibal found the lube he had placed there earlier that day when he had readied the small rented house. He slicked two fingers and waited until Will’s wild blue eyes flickered open before he pressed both into Will.

Will’s back arched off the bed, knees bending to make room for Hannibal’s fingers. Will groaned at the stretch that burned up his spine and to the back of his head and down into his toes that were curled into the blanket. A heat was in his muscles as they all contracted to stop whatever it was that Hannibal was doing to him.

“Hurts so good,” Will got out through his teeth. A free hand snatched up his leg and teeth ripped into the sensitive skin behind his knee as the fingers worked him over desperately in an attempt to stretch him out as quickly as they could. “Use me, Hannibal. Don’t think about me.”

Hannibal’s eyes jumped to Will’s face at the permission. Permission that he didn’t need, but was not about to turn down. He pulled his fingers from Will and pulled the empath closer, forcing Will to his knees before lining himself up and pushing himself inside.

Will’s face scrunched up at the intrusion, pain making his breath catch as immediately as it had with Hannibal’s hand around his throat. Hannibal didn’t wait, didn’t allow Will a chance to collect himself. He set a ruthless pace with a dry movement that left Will feeling each and every inch that was sunk into him.

Will didn’t fight as he was shoved down into the mattress with a hand tangled in his curls. Will’s spine curved into a ridiculous position that made his mind spin as each thrust in hit his prostate at the most delicious angle. He could take it, take everything his beast was giving him, everything that Hannibal was finally letting him fully see.

The buildup was swift and made Will’s gut clench as try to suck down air as every push and pull from Hannibal made obscene noises leave his lips. His knuckles ached from where they had tangled themselves into the duvet and his spine was beginning to burn from the curve it was forced into. His knees trembled as they attempted to stay upright with each destructive push in that nearly toppled him.

“Please,” Will begged, unseeing as he blinked. He hid his face into the blanket with a cry, biting the fabric into his mouth. Nails dug into his hip, a stickiness coating his skin at the contact. “I’m going to come if you keep doing this.”

Hannibal wasn’t even sure he heard Will’s begging. It took a moment for the words to register in his mind, his person so deeply hidden away. But even as the words sunk in, he found himself not caring. Those were Will’s wants and he wasn’t anywhere near finished Even if Will came, he wasn’t about to stop. Will would be pinned down like this all night long if it would finally sate the beast inside of him, a beast that was always hungry, always clawing for release. A beast that wasn’t about to return to its cage any time soon. His beast was lost in Will and only Will.

“No, you won’t,” Hannibal countered, leaning over to bite at the base of Will’s spine. There was a whimper from the body beneath him. “You will be good and let me come first.”

“Han-Hannibal,” Will pleaded, struggling against Hannibal’s grip for the first time. “I-I can’t last that long.”

“Yes, you will. Won’t you?”

It wasn’t gentle encouragement, it wasn’t a kind pep talk. It was an order and Will found himself nodding in agreement. “Yes, Hannibal.” A choked sob left Will at a harsher thrust that sent him scrambling to stay on his knees, hands anchoring him the best that they could. Pain shifted to pleasure as it so often did when he was wrapped in the scent of forest, wine and books.

His neglected length was angry and hot between his legs, but he wasn’t sure if he would survive Hannibal if he or his husband tried to reach for it. He was barely keeping himself from snapping with a sharp bite to his bottom lip that reopened the markings that Hannibal had left there.

Salty copper coated his tongue once more and he sighed into the flavor, the words spilling from him before he could stop them. “What are you going to make from me?”

“I’m going to cut you open right here,” Hannibal growled out, the hand at Will’s hip circling around to his stomach, His index finger trailed from Will’s sternum, over the right side of his body, following the curve of his ribs, the touch bright and hot. Will moaned as his mind attempted to place exactly what was there worth taking. “We could come back to this spot over and over again, Will.”

“Liver,” Will gasped out as the organ finally came to mind. “Can’t they do that micro-” Will couldn’t stop a cry that left his throat as Hannibal’s nails dragged down his front and caught on the scarring over his stomach. “You want me scarred,” Will decided.

“Marked by me,” Hannibal agreed. “I want you to remember.”

As if Will could forget. He could never forget again. Never again. He wouldn’t let himself. He would be here for Hannibal for the rest of his days just as he had promised. Just as he had said as soon as that ring graced his finger. A ring that matched so beautifully with Hannibal’s own as Hannibal leaned over, hand clutching at Will’s, the silver band catching the red and blue flashing outside of the window. Will couldn’t hear the sirens though. All sound was drowned out with Hannibal’s entire presence that was on Will deeply in obsidian darkness.

“Fuck,” Will whispered as teeth honored his flesh with a sharpness that made him weak. Blood dripped down his arm and Will’s eyes rolled back as his hair was tugged so harshly it gave him an immediate headache, arms pushing himself from his elbows. “I want a taste of you too Hannibal. I want to be the only one who knows you inside and out.”

“You don’t know what you’re asking*, berniukas*.”

“Like hell I do, Hannibal.” Will’s breath caught in his throat as the heat grew overwhelming. His legs trembled and his arms ached under the assault that Hannibal continued to bruise into his body. The room was lit up like the Fourth of July with dancing reds and blues, a faint idea in Will’s mind, shoved far away by the dirty sounds of skin against skin and the bed creaking as it moved with Hannibal’s thrusts. “I will taste you and you will taste me and there is no way that I would forget-forget that. God, Hannibal.” Will’s arms gave out, his elbow buckling and he was once more pressed into the mattress. “Hannibal, I-I can’t last like this,” the broken warning came again.

“Yes, you will.”

“You’ll keep me forever, won’t you, my beast?”

There was another sharp bite to Will’s shoulder and nails clawed into his skin once more, pain twisting in the most beautifully dark void around Will. Somewhere safe to keep him with his beast, with Hannibal’s complete vileness to keep him company.

“Just to please me,” Hannibal answered against Will’s shoulder before licking at the marking across Will’s neck that Will was certain would scar.

The buzzing up Will’s spine was on the edge of unbearable and Will moaned as he forced himself to hold on a little longer through the constant thrusts against his prostate, the jello of his legs and the brokenness of his arms. His lungs begged for air, throat on fire from where he had been clasped earlier. Everything ached, used and abused.

“Never lose me again.”

“Never.”

“Hurry Doctor,” Will whispered, voice nearly lost to him. “Get your fill. I need mine.”

“Not tonight.”

Will gave a whimper at the unfairness of the words, watching once more passing red and blue cover his skin and reflect against their wedding bands.

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mano meilė: **my love**

Tikiuosi, kad taip, mano meile: ***I hope so, my love***

Mano geras berniukas. Ar visada buvote tokia purvina?: ***My good boy. Have you always been so dirty?***

berniukas: ***boy***

Chapter 36

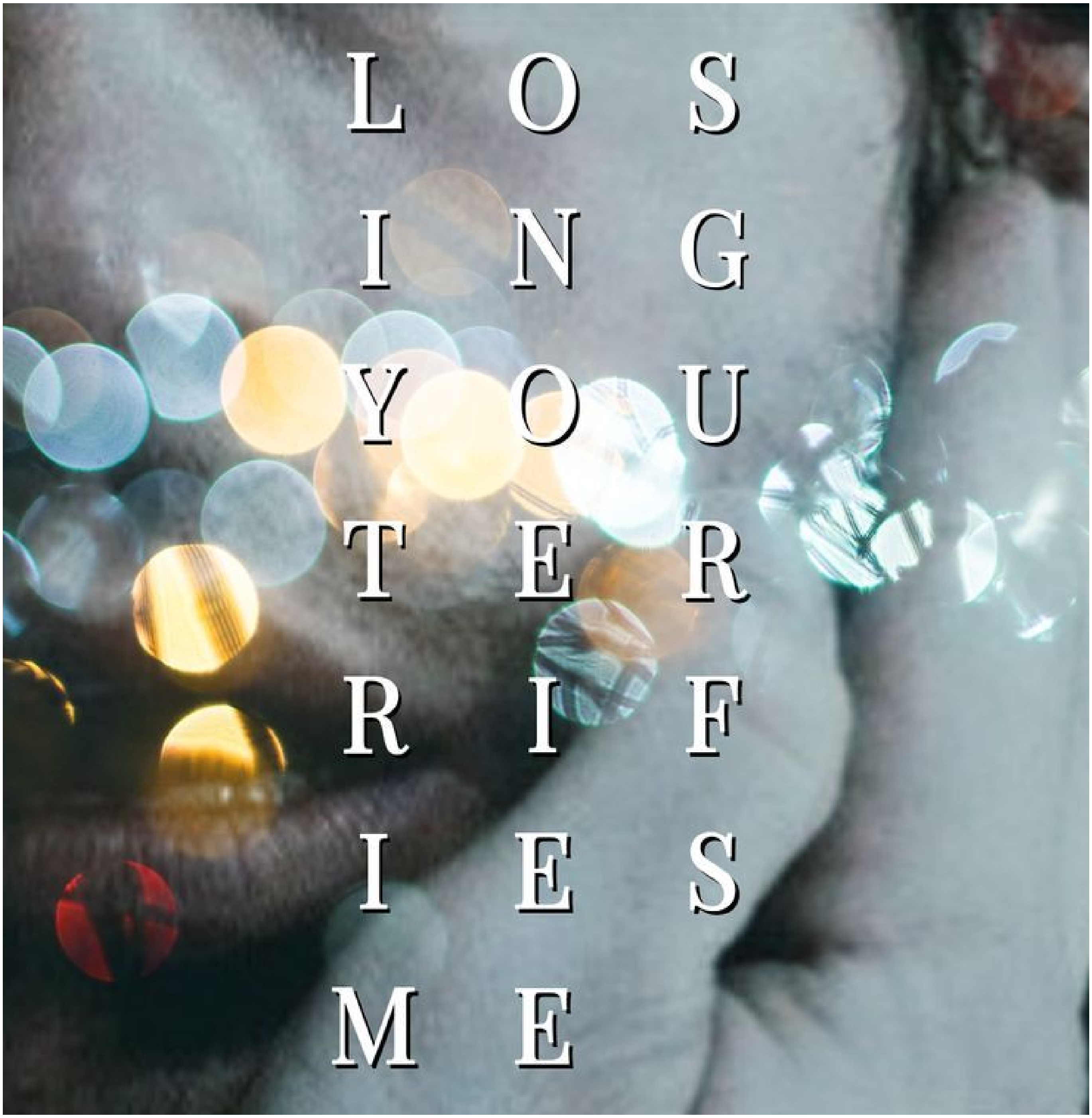
Chapter Summary

Will would remove them both. No more pain or suffering and absolutely no more blood. No more crimson spilt. No more life drained away in sticky copper scents. No more blood. This was right. This was just. This was how it needed to end. Something glorious enough to fit the killer that Will held tightly to, but also something that they could never come back from. Not like that swan dive from the cliff, though how they did survive was still a question to Will. The memory was foggy at best. But he didn't need to remember. Not now. Now when smoke caressed his lungs and head and kept him and his love warm against the rainy chill that was trying to sweep into the house.

Chapter Notes

Oh Lord. We about to hit some stuff.... Time for the final arc to begin. I hope you all enjoy. Now if you will excuse me, I am going to try not to dig out my uterus with a plastic fork because that would probably feel much better than the cramps I've got going on that no amount of medicine could possibly pernitrate. But I digress. Love you all!

See the end of the chapter for more notes



Being missed was unfamiliar to Walter, the words having never been said to him by anyone other than his mother who had to say those words to him. It was like a law that mothers had to miss their children, so it didn't really count. Will wasn't his dad. Not really. But Will missed him, so that had to actually mean something.

Walter let himself sit in the feeling for probably longer than he needed to, unable to sleep that night at the idea that soon his dad would be coming for him. His dad and Hannibal. But even the feeling of Hannibal's unwelcomeness was softened by the love that Will had for him.

And that love he could give back with his obedience. The Verger's home was going to be his personal vacation and he didn't much mind the idea. No school, no bullies, no homework. That was so far away and Walter was going to enjoy it while it lasted. If Hannibal was anything to go on, Walter knew he would be back at school immediately, something stuck up, stuffy and prestigious.

And the action started that evening. Alana and Margot had to go out of town for a few hours after dinner and Walter had been placed in charge. Well, kind of in charge. He was the backup if staff wasn't able to fulfill their duties of looking after the boys.

Why not play around with the kid? After all, Morgan had been nice to him and Walter's dad had told him that Walter was safe with Alana and Margot. He could relax and be better. Morgan could be his friend. At least for the time being. He could pretend. It would be better than sitting around all day and reading god awful boring books. Did no one like baseball or comics? Was it that hard to find even just a Green Lantern comic to read?

He walked through the hall, passing by a grandfather clock that sounded every day at nine A.M. and nine P.M. respectfully. One for when Morgan was supposed to be in bed and the other for when Morgan's morning classes were supposed to start. Walter had learned to ignore the chiming and song that played out.

Without a knock, he pushed open the door to Morgan's room and stepped in, flicking on the light. "Morning, kid," he called. Morgan moaned, rolling over and rubbing his blue eyes tiredly. "Wake up."

"What time is it?" Morgan whispered with a yawn.

"Like ten PM," Walter answered with a shrug.

Morgan groaned and pulled the blankets over his head. "Wally, it's late. I want to sleep."

"Let's play." Walter moved over to the bed and sat down, pulling at the blanket.

"No, I'm sleepy," Morgan grumbled, grip weak. The blanket was pulled from his hands and he opened his eyes once more.

"Come on," Walter pushed again. "Let's play."

"No."

"You're gonna miss me when my dad finally comes to get me," Walter reminded, teasing in his tone. That seemed to do the trick. Morgan sat up and stretched before rubbing at his tired eyes again. "Let's go find Applesauce." Walter got to his feet and made his way to the door.

"Wait up!" Morgan said with a bright smile, rushing after Walter. He reached out and snatched onto Walter's arm so he could keep up with the boy whose steps were much faster and larger than his. Walter glanced down at the hold on his arm, but didn't say anything. "My moms are gonna-"

"They won't know, kid."

"How?"

"Just trust me, will ya?" Walter shot the kid a smile and pulled him along to the kennel where Morgan dropped to his knees and opened up the gate. Applesauce mauled Morgan, knocking the boy off his feet with licks. Morgan giggled and pushed at the dog's face. Walter smiled and made the same noise that Will had taught him. "Tss." Applesauce immediately moved from Morgan and sat down, tail wagging and tongue hanging out.

"Whoa," Morgan whispered, sitting up. "How did you do that? I can't ever get Applesauce to listen to me."

"You have to show them that you're the alpha," Walter explained just as Will had to him once upon a time. "Right now you're just a friend. You're not in charge and unless you're in charge, they won't listen to you."

"I tried to teach Applesauce to roll over, but we didn't really get very far." Morgan reached out and patted the dog's head. Walter smiled.

"Are there treats? We could work on that."

"In the kitchen," Morgan answered immediately, jumping to his feet. "I'll get them!"

Something soft was placed to Will's cheek and he gave a small huff of laughter, but couldn't bring himself to open his eyes. He turned and hid his face further into the mattress, unsure where any pillows were. He didn't really care. His mind was far more focused on the absolutely wrecked soreness in his body.

"Good Morning, Mr. Lecter," a sweet voice whispered and Will groaned.

"I can't go another round with you yet," Will muttered, fingers tangling in the bed sheets as kisses were pressed along his bare back.

"Did I finally sate your hunger, Will?" Hannibal teased, nipping at Will's bruised shoulder. Will moaned and his hips rocked into the mattress at a stirring in his gut. There was a chuckle from Hannibal. "Not ready for another round, Mr. Lecter? You wouldn't be lying to me, would you?"

"No," Will answered, arching up with a sigh against Hannibal's traveling kisses against his back. Hannibal sucked at the skin behind Will's ear and his hips ground once more into the bed. "Maybe," he corrected with a groan. "I don't know if I could take you inside of me just yet."

"I hurt you that badly, did I?" There was something smug in the question, something that told Will that Hannibal wasn't sorry at all for what had occurred hours before. "Good." Hands took Will's hips and pulled him up and onto his hands and knees. Will gasped at the movement and his arms and legs shook under his weight. "You won't be forgetting me anytime soon, will you?" A kiss was placed to the small of his back.

"No," Will answered in a breathless whisper. "I'll be able to feel you for the rest of my life."

"That is my design."

Will gasped and bit at his bottom lip as fingertips brushed against his abused entrance. His lip throbbed between his teeth, most likely bruised from Hannibal's bite the night before. "Please," Will whispered, heart pounding in his throat. He swallowed around it as the fingers continued to circle him with the utmost gentleness. "Careful."

“Careful?” Hannibal asked back with a small laugh. “I never want to be careful with you again. I doubt you deserve such a fate, darling boy.” Will’s head dropped, neck already tired with holding up the weight of his head. Fog spung messily across his vision and his shoulder ached at the position he was once more holding. “You’re still so open for me, I don’t even have to waste time prepping you.” Will gasped as a finger pressed easily inside of him and could feel tears prick at his eyes. “You could take me so beautifully like this.”

“Gentle, Hannibal,” Will warned once more, toes curling at a hot pain in his gut as his body sent blood south once more, against his willing it not to. “Hurts.”

“Perfect.” A hand took his half hard length and stroked at it firmly. Will’s elbows buckled and he dropped down to his forearms to stay upright. “I want you broken into pieces Will. A shattered teacup that I can put back together when I want to.”

“H-Hannibal.” The name was hissed through Will’s teeth, knuckles aching at how hard he was clinging to the sheets in his fists. A second finger pushed into him with no issue and a trembling ran up Will’s spine. “I-I can’t, Hannibal. Please.”

“I think we proved last night that your cant’s are a mind over matter issue, Mr. Lecter. You can and you will as long as I see fit.”

Hannibal's fingers crooked and Will couldn't hold back the cry as his prostate was pushed into and rubbed at relentlessly.

"Fuck. Oh my god, Hannibal," Will gasped out, shaking his head numbly. "I can't. It hurts."

"Then tell me to stop," Hannibal instructed. "I would never give you more than what I think you could handle, dear boy."

"I want you," Will whispered, unsure where the words were coming from. His mind was fogged over and his mouth was working without his instruction. "Please, Hannibal."

There was a hum from Hannibal behind him and a kiss to his thigh as the fingers inside of him continued to abuse that bundle of nerves.

"You're sure you can take me?"

"Give me you, damn it Hannibal." Despite the ache in his knees, Will noticed that he was rocking back onto Hannibal's fingers like some desperate teenager.

"I need you to be able to walk today, dear boy. We do have items of business to attend to." There was a smug sort of smile in Hannibal's tone and Will glanced over his shoulder and to his husband who looked just as battered and bruised as Will felt.

"Stop being such an ass and be my monster," Will hissed. "Break this bed while you use me."

"Any other demands of me, Mr. Lecter?" Hannibal teased.

"You're enjoying that name quite a bit," Will whispered as Hannibal slowly guided him onto his back. Will gave a small smile and made room for Hannibal to settle between his thighs. Hannibal kissed at Will's cheek, guiding Will's legs around his hips.

"I'm a bit partial to it," Hannibal admitted softly as he pressed himself inside of Will. Will winced with a hiss and circled his arms around Hannibal to ground himself. "Are you-"

"Don't grow a conscious now, Dr. Lecter," Will muttered, breath straining in his lungs. His eyes flickered open, lashes damp with tears. Every inch of his body was alight with pain, but his monster would fix that. His monster would trick him into pleasure. "Don't stop until I'm screaming your name."

"You terrible creature," Hannibal reprimanded with a sharp thrust of his hips.

"Fuck!"

"You screamed my name last night. Is your throat not sore?"

"Not like yours." Will shot Hannibal a wicked grin that was snapped off his face with another harsh thrust. Will's nails dug into Hannibal's back at the punishing rhythm that was set. "Yes," Will whispered, clutching Hannibal tightly to him. "Like that, monster."

There was a growl and a bite to Will's neck. Will's head tipped back to allow Hannibal room to work. "You keep calling me that," Hannibal muttered breathlessly.

"I'm a bit partial to it," Will teased, once more put in his place with a deep thrust.

Margot gave a smile. "Let me speak to him," she said softly as she looked over the adorable little scene that had a frown on Alana's face. "Maybe we should get Morgan back to his own bed. There's no telling how late they were up."

Margot stepped closer to the bed where both Walter and Morgan were snuggled down into Applesauce, who looked up at Margot's approaching form before laying her head back on her paws.

She reached over and ruffled Morgan's growing locks that were more curly than she thought they would be. He must have gotten them from her mother's side of the family.

Her brother's blue eyes opened to stare up at her and she gave her son a smile. She had long since gotten over the terror of those eyes that looked up at her with the same intenseness that her brother had, but the boy being her son did nothing to keep those memories at bay. She couldn't blame the poor child. He had been her salvation and she loved him dearly, even if he wasn't truly hers.

"Morgan, go with your mother back to bed. Take Applesauce with you. I need to speak to Wally," Margot whispered softly.

Morgan gave a tired nod and climbed from the bed, a whistle called Applesauce after him. Walter sat up at movement from the dog and rubbed at his eyes with a yawn. He watched as Morgan was guided out of the room and glanced around. He couldn't remember having fallen asleep, but he was grateful that for once it had been a blank sleep and not full of dead bodies.

Margot waited for Alana to shut the door before she turned to Walter, smile kind with no hidden agenda behind it.

"Wally, we've been speaking to your dad. They will be stopping by later today to pick you up."

"Today?" Walter asked, sleep snapping from his system immediately. He sat up a bit straighter, eyes a bit brighter. "Today, today?"

Margot's laugh was light and sweet and Walter couldn't help but think that he would miss the woman's kind nature.

"Today, today," she agreed with a nod. "There's also something else you need to know, Wally." Margot was quiet for a moment and Walter's brows furrowed. "I just want you to be prepared for what's coming."

"What?" Walter asked in confusion. "Margot, what do you mean? I already know that Hannibal is going to be with him. That doesn't bother-"

"They got married, Wally."

Walter stared and Margot reached out to take his shoulder with a gentle squeeze in hope that the boy would stay stable.

"Married," he whispered, with a nod. "They're married. This is... Really going to be it, isn't it?"

"What do you mean?" Margot slowly moved closer to Walter and sat beside him on the bed, feet up and back against the headboard in a single fluid movement.

Walter looked over her for a moment before finally answering. "I'm going to be living on the run with two murderers."

"Will isn’t-"

"Please," Walter interrupted. "I know my dad isn't as innocent as everyone thinks he is. I don't know everything in excruciating detail, but if someone like Hannibal loves my dad, then he has to have done something."

Margot was quiet and gave a small nod. "Are you going to be alright?"

"Alright?" Walter gave a laugh. "I have to be. I don't have much of a choice. I doubt Hannibal has much of a level temper or a tolerance for things that cause annoyance. I refuse to be one."

"You could stay here. Or we can make arrangements for you to live with your family," Margot offered.

"Will is my family," Walter said firmly.

"Your mother's family," Margot clarified.

Walter gave a look of dislike and Margot blinked in question. "My grandparents want nothing to do with me after that serial killer attacked us and my aunt has never liked me because I was just some one night stand mistake and my mom should have gotten rid of me the moment she found out I was going to be born. Will is honestly the best I've got." Walter gave a deep and thoughtful sigh. "And he's what I want. I don't want to be with something as uncertain as you or my mother's family. No offense," he added quickly.

"None taken," Margot assured lightly. "I know that my wife is difficult to live with."

"That's an understatement," Walter grumbled and Margot gave another laugh.

"Wally, I wanted to thank you for being so kind to my son while you've been here. I know he is difficult to get along with. He's got his own little personality." Margot took Walter's shoulder once more and Walter grimaced at the lie that was being told. He hadn't been kind in the slightest. It took his dad ordering him to do such a thing for him to finally start acting like a decent human being. "He's been through some really hard times lately. You've been... He talks about you all of the time. You make him so happy."

“I really didn’t do much,” Walter whispered, guilt pooling through him like Noah’s flood.

“Listening to him is enough to gain his favor. Alana and I aren't around much. We try to make as much time for him as we can. That’s why I take him riding, but between work and his schooling, we really only have meals to spend together. And he doesn’t have many friends. Only business partners’ children when we have meetings.” Margot gave a sad breath out and shook her head. “You have no idea what seeing him smiling again feels like. He hasn’t smiled in so long.”

“It was because of him being kidnapped, wasn’t it?”

Margot froze, blue eyes tight on Walter and Walter blinked, mouth shut tight. He hadn’t meant for the words to come out. He had told Morgan that he wouldn’t tell, but the curiosity had taken over him before he could stop it.

“How do you know about that?” Margot asked softly, lips barely moving.

“I-I-I...” Walter gave a fake smile and shrugged. “Can we have breakfast?”

“Walter Jonathan Graham,” Margot hissed and Walter stopped, eyes wide as he looked over the normally calm and monotone woman. He hadn’t known that the woman was capable of any other emotion other than mostly bored and he couldn’t stop the shock buzzing through his system. “I do not often demand to know things from you, but this is concerning my son and is important. How did you hear about that?”

“He-he told me not to tell you. Please!” Walter begged, unsure why he was sticking up for the child that had been nothing more than an annoyance since day one. “Morgan told me. He said that he’s afraid of water now because he was held underwater and nearly died. Please don’t tell him I told you. He doesn’t want you to know.”

“Thank you for letting me know.” Margot gave a small nod. “I won’t tell him or Alana. This will stay between us. Promise.”

Walter gave a relieved breath. “Can we eat breakfast now?”

Margot gave a smile. “I’m sure we can find something. Come on.” She tapped Walter’s knee and got from the bed, Walter quickly following after.

“Hey, Margot?” Walter asked as he stepped out of the door she held open for him. She hummed in answer and Walter looked down at his hands as he followed the now very familiar path of hallways. “Thanks for not pushing on the marriage thing. I’m not sure I’m quite ready to face that yet.”

“You’re a strong boy, Wally.” Margot reached out and ruffled at the dark hair on Walter’s head and Walter ducked away from her with a smile. “I’m sure you will figure this out.”

“Are my parents good people, Margot?” Walter grimaced at the question. “Do I have anything to be afraid of?”

“Your parents are wonderfully kind people,” Margot assured. “They just have a bit more darkness in them than normal people. They would never hurt you Walter. They aren’t men like that. They will protect you. The rest of the world is who needs to be afraid of them.”

* * *

Will gave a sigh and looked over the tape that was across his front door in Wolf Trap. There was something unreal about the location being taped off as a crime scene, long forgotten now and just never cleaned up.

“Everything alright, *mylimasis*?” Hannibal asked, a hand resting against the small of Will’s back. Will glanced over at Hannibal before he turned back to the staircase in front of him that led up to the deck.

“This place is stained now,” Will whispered, glancing back and towards the driveway where there was a darker color across some of the pavement. He closed his eyes with a deep breath and clenched his fists. “I don’t want to be here, Hannibal. I don’t like it here.”

“Let’s just grab some of your things and some stuff for the boy and we’ll be on our way,” Hannibal whispered comfortingly, pressing a kiss to Will’s temple. “We never have to come back here again.”

“Do you know how many people I lost or nearly lost here?” Will closed his eyes and turned his head away from the house.

“*Stiprybės, mano brangiausias*,” Hannibal said in a constructive voice that Will found oddly assuring. Will gave a nod and went for the stairs, climbing them two at a time, Hannibal close behind him.

The house was cold, empty and yet so loud with the screams that were trapped in the walls. Will took a moment longer to gather his strength before he pushed into the home and glanced around. The kitchen had been cleared from the dinner that Hannibal had been making that night. The rope gone, the blood gone, the knives gone. Everything was stripped to the barest that it could be, but clean all the same. Cleaned away as if the monstrous night had never occurred.

“Will,” A sharp voice said to his side.

Will winced at the tone and closed his eyes. He really couldn’t do this right now. He wasn’t sure he could ever do this again. His mind was usually so pleasantly blank with Hannibal around, so why was she here now?

“You got married?” Molly asked, stepping through the house easily, fingers running across the kitchen chair that she had been tied in that night. Will opened his eyes and took a step away from her, bumping into a person and Will jumped with a small sound from his throat. Will turned to face Hannibal and found a concerned look from the man. “You’re that afraid of him?” Molly mocked, something so out of her character that it made Will stiffen up.

“Will?” Hannibal asked softly, a hand gently caressing his cheek. Will shifted away from him and stumbled away.

“I’m just going to go get some of Wally’s things,” Will whispered, pointing to the stairs before racing to them.

“How is my son, Will?” Molly asked, already waiting in the upstairs hall for him when he reached the top of the stairs. “You do remember that he is mine, don’t you?”

“He’s just as much mine as he is yours, Molly,” Will corrected, pushing open the door to Walter’s bedroom. He stopped, coming face to face with a massive mess strewn across a desktop. Will hesitated, but slowly made his way over to it and stopped.

“Insightive little thing, isn't he?” Molly asked, reaching out to pick up a piece of paper that had a picture of Hannibal and Will on it. One from somewhere in Europe, somewhere deep in Italy. “Learning everything he can on Hannibal.”

Will could only stare at the echoes of his own past, each one slowly a little louder than the others. Will’s fingers trailed over the picture of Italy and he tried desperately to pull that moment to the forefront of his mind, but couldn’t find it.

“Was this you protecting my son, Will? Was this you doing what was right for our family?”

“I...” Will trailed off, dropping the picture before reaching out to another one that was pinned to a cork board. He pulled it from the pin and stared at a cliff face that had a single house at the top of it. Why did he know this house? “I taught him how to stay safe.”

“Safe? My son, chasing after killers is him staying safe?” Molly scoffed, but her voice wasn’t quite as grating as it had once been. Will’s focus was far more pinpointed on the picture in his hand.

He had another relapse, which is becoming more and more constant now, Hannibal’s written words told him from a notebook. A black leather notebook that he hadn’t dared to open since Alana had given it to him. But he had read it before. Many, many times before. He was sure of it. *He’s still on that cliff....*

Will dropped the picture and scrambled from the room and towards his bedroom, tearing open the door and racing to his dresser. He ripped open the top drawer and pulled at the fake bottom until he came face to face with sketches and letters from Hannibal’s hand as well as the black leather notebook that would be filled with Hannibal's cursive. He had hidden the notebook away the moment Hannibal had stayed, knowing that everything would crumble eventually and he didn’t want this taken.

Will snatched up the notebook and flipped it open, staring down at the words on the first page.

Injuries include stab wounds to the shoulder and face. Both have been stitched. Head trauma, a concussion most likely. Sprained wrist. Possible bruised lung. Possible short term amnesia. I won’t know the extent of it until Will is more responsive. He’s still heavily sedated due to his injuries.

Will’s hands trembled as he flipped through the pages a few more times until landing on another entry.

Will snuck into the bathroom while I was in the bath and tried to drown me. Cunning boy almost succeeded. If he had paid more attention to his surroundings, he would have noticed the items within my reach. A wine glass is something I had never considered a weapon, but it was vicious in its use.

A sharp pain erupted behind Will's eyes and he gasped, a hand going to his right temple in an attempt to keep his head from splitting in half. He stumbled back and into the bed, book tumbling from his hands.

"You're unstable," Molly said in Will's ear.

"Shut up," Will hissed, clutching to the bed frame to keep upright.

"My son doesn't need someone as fucked up as you as their father."

"Shut up!" Will yelled, voice bright as it bounced around the room.

The clawfoot tub was a brilliant white looking like it had just been scrubbed clean with bleach. Steam rose into the air, the room silent in its relaxed state. A man with silvering hair lay in the tub. As Will stepped closer he found the pristine tub was filled with a deep crimson liquid, something that shouldn't be bathed in.

And there was Hannibal. Eyes closed, hands gripping the sides of the tub, a glass of wine near him on a chair that he had moved to the tub.

Will wasn't sure where he was, but a lighthouse was not something he thought he would find at the bottom of a cliff in the Atlantic and he was sure that whether this was a dream or hell, that he was going to finish what he started. Hannibal couldn't be in this world. Not anymore. Not after what they had both done together. And he didn't belong here either. He would take care of that.

With silent footsteps, Will stepped up to the tub, going to one side, hands finding Hannibal's throat as if it were second nature. Maroon eyes jumped awake, but Will shoved them under the blood that filled the tub.

Fingernails clawed at Will's wrists, drawing blood to mix with the tub. Feet kicked and the blood splashed across the tiles, wetting Will's bare feet.

Will would remove them both. No more pain or suffering and absolutely no more blood. No more crimson spilt. No more life drained away in sticky copper scents. No more fucking blood.

A wine glass shattered against Will's face and Will slipped in his attempt to step out of the way. Hannibal rose to the surface sputtering and coughing, water leaving his mouth.

Will blinked. Water. He was sitting in a puddle of it that was slowly being stained with the red wine that had been thrown at him. His fingers touched the small nick in his cheek. It wouldn't be enough to leave a scar, but it was enough to wake him up.

With wide eyes, Will scrambled away from the tub, spreading the water further across the bathroom floor. Hannibal climbed from the tub, grabbing a nearby towel and wrapping it around his waist, coughing so hard he began dry heaving. His hand took the side of the tub until he finally emptied his stomach into the tub and Will could only watch.

Hannibal's legs shook and he dropped to the bathroom floor, looking over at Will with watering eyes and flushed skin. "Are you alright?" he rasped out, throat raw. Will gave a shocked look, pushing himself even further away from Hannibal who was abnormally calm for having nearly *been killed. "We need to get that cut taken care of so it doesn't get infected and make sure you don't have any glass in it."*

"I-I just," Will stuttered. "But I just-"

"Doctor's orders."

"You're as sick as him," Molly whispered.

Will's knees gave out beneath him and he tumbled downwards before swift hands caught him. "Will," Hannibal said in concern, supporting the empath's weight as he trembled, hands still clutching at his head.

"Sick," Molly repeated, stepping around Hannibal. "He's going to kill my son, Will."

"No," Will whispered, so many voices and images swirling through his head he was going to throw up.

The stairs creaked and Will held his breath, keeping his back flushed to the wall, listening as footsteps started up it. Simple, tired footsteps, heading to bed after a long day of God's knows what. Probably disposing of another body. It would make sense with the amount of blood that stained the hallways, the amount of blood that caked Will's feet and gummed up between his toes.

The silver haired man hit the landing and Will moved with a deep breath, a single fluid motion. His hands found Hannibal's chest and he shoved. Hands desperately snatched at Will's arms, but he pulled his arms free from the death grip and the man tumbled down the stairs.

"You think that Hannibal Lecter wants my child around him?" Molly demanded, voice a shout. Will shook his head. "He just wants to use you like he always has."

"Will, look at me," Hannibal whispered, pulling Will's face to look up at him.

Will kept his eyes shut tight, head pounding, splitting in two. Bile rose in his throat as his stomach lurched. "No," he whispered, shaking his head in Hannibal's grip despite the fact that it just made his head throb. "No, no, no, no."

Hannibal slumped in his chair and Will let the wine glass slip from the man's fingers, falling and shattering on the floor. Will rose to his feet and set his glass of whiskey aside, eyes going to find the lighthouse out of the window.

The spiral stripes were menacing now, no comfort in them now that the drugs were fully out of Will's system. His shoulder ached with a deep stiffness, but it wouldn't matter soon. Not when smoke was already slowly beginning to seep into the house from the outlet box that Will had tampered with earlier.

Will walked over to Hannibal's chair and his eyes looked over the man that had missed the drugs in his own wine. Will's hand reached out and he brushed back the silvering locks of hair from Hannibal's face, sad that he would never see those brilliantly red eyes again.

"This is my design," Will whispered, tipping Hannibal's head back to kiss the man. As much as Will wished the man could kiss back, he knew that his fate would be sealed if Hannibal did kiss him back. He would never be able to kill Hannibal if Hannibal were to kiss him back, if Hannibal were able to love him. It was safer this way.

Will pulled Hannibal's body from the chair and laid the man out on the floor, placed in a comfortable position. Something natural and simple as if Hannibal had chosen to take an afternoon nap on the hardwood floor.

Will glanced up at the flicker of bright orange and yellow, smoke now fully blocking all view of the lighthouse, of his Watching Star.

Will gave a sad little smile as he slowly lowered himself to be beside Hannibal, a hand taking the killer's. He closed his eyes and curled up into Hannibal's side, listening to the crackling of the fire eating at the house around them.

The smoke held an acrid scent, so pungent that Will could taste the burning materials.

This was right. This was just. This was how it needed to end. Something glorious enough to fit the killer that Will held tightly to, but also something that they could never come back from. Not like that swan dive from the cliff, though how they did survive was still a question to Will. The memory was foggy at best. But he didn't need to remember. Not now. Now when smoke caressed his lungs and head and kept him and his love warm against the rainy chill that was trying to sweep into the house.

"The moment you are away, you will kill Wally," Molly screamed in Will's ear and Will sobbed at the way the words dinged around the inside of his skull like a bell. "Hannibal will manipulate you to."

"No," Will repeated once more, fighting against the hands that held to him, supported him carefully.

"You're going to take a knife to my baby boy, Will!"

"Will," Hannibal's voice was distant, begging for Will's attention, but he just couldn't find the right door to the man. Everything in his head was scrambled and every turn was a wrong one that sent him spiraling into another memory that had once upon a time been locked away like Fort Knox.

"Hannibal!" Will shouted, sitting upright in bed. Will gasped, limbs burning and tangled in the sheets around him. He scrambled to tear himself free, but it only made the pain grow brighter in his shoulder and cheek. "Hannibal!"

The door to the room opened and the older man stepped in, weak on his feet, hand clutching his side. He strode over to the edge of the bed and both hands gripped either side of Will's face. Will *sucked in air greedily, but it did nothing to help.*

H-Hannibal," Will stuttered, the only word he could say being the man's name. "Han-Hanni-Han-"

"I'm right here, Will," he assured in a tired voice, though his eyes held concern all the same. "Nothing's going to hurt you. I'm right here." Fingers petted his head. "Go back to sleep."

"No," Will argued, shaking his head. "No." He pushed at Hannibal's grip and Hannibal let Will go. Will scrambled from the ensnaring bedsheets and collapsed to the floor as his knees buckled under his weight. Hannibal helped him back up and into the bed without so much as an annoyed huff at Will's incompetence. "Where are we? Where's Jack? What-"

"Will," Hannibal said a little more sternly. "I'm going to sedate you again if you continue to freak out every time you wake up."

Will's mouth shut as phantom images of needles and surgical equipment swam into view. He shuttered. "We're alive," he whispered and met those amber eyes. Hannibal gave a small nod. "How are we alive?"

"Later, Will. You need rest." Hannibal lowered his head into his hand and rubbed at his eyes. "We both need rest."

"You aren't upset with me?"

"Upset?" Hannibal echoed incredulously, though he didn't look up. "I am furious Will, but not tonight. I can't fight again tonight." Hannibal shook his head with a sigh. "I'm not strong enough to do this again tonight."

"Again..." Will whispered, tasting the word on his lips. "What do you mean again?"

"You have amnesia," Hannibal explained, finally looking up. "You keep waking up back at the cliff and I-I don't know how much more I can do this. I can't keep waking up to your hands around my throat or a knife ready to be plunged into my chest. I'm not strong enough for that right now."

Will was silent for a moment as he tried to fit the explanation somewhere in his memory, but found that he came up empty. He couldn't remember touching Hannibal in such a way. Just clinging to the man as blood kept their bodies suspended in a warm chill.

"How long has it been?" Will questioned, unsure what else to say. What was he supposed to say to that? Especially since it seemed like they had had this conversation a multitude of times. That felt right to Will. They had done this before. Over and over again, even if Will couldn't remember.

"A week or two, I think. The first few days are blurry. I haven't bothered much with the date."

Will gave a small nod and he looked out of the window and up to a fuzzy looking lighthouse. It was beautiful in a haunted sort of way. Run down and chipping so that the spiral around her tall column was broken up in places. Rain pattered against the window, thunder rumbling just off the coast, promising a night of fantastical lightning.

"You didn't kill me," Will pointed out in a whisper, the fact hanging heavily in the air.

"I didn't kill you," Hannibal answered softly.

"You could have left me behind."

"I could never leave you behind."

"You were beautiful, Hannibal," Will said, calling bloody eyes to his face. Will slowly reached out, a hand taking the killer's, blood from the Great Red Dragon coating their hands in a slick heat. It dripped to the floor slowly like molasses. "You've always been beautiful."

"Will, go back to sleep." There was a hurt note in Hannibal's voice as he pulled his hand free from Will's and Will's heart stopped as the blood vanished, having never truly been there at all. "You're letting the drugs talk for you."

"I love you Hannibal." The words were swift and a slur and Hannibal stared at the empath with wide eyes. "I hope that you know that."

"Please," Hannibal begged, entire countenance broken. "Don't do this again."

"I shoved us from the cliff because I couldn't let us live," Will explained, fingers tangling into the sheets that he had been so desperately trying to rip from earlier. He couldn't find it in himself to address the fact that this had also been a previous conversation. How many times had they had this same exchange of words? "Something as dangerous and as beautiful as us can't live. We would bathe the world in blood if we continue on the way we are."

"The way we are?" Hannibal asked.

Will nodded and licked at his lips. "I'm my own Becoming Hannibal," Will answered, eyes once more going to the dreamy lighthouse outside the window. Thunder rumbled and shook the windows before a bright light lit up the world around them like a beacon from heaven before it withered into darkness once more. "I would kill with you again if it always felt like that and that's..." Will trailed off, searching for the right words. "That would go against everything I have always stood for on all levels. I can't do that with you. It's not possible."

"Will-"

"That doesn't change how much I love you," Will pushed on, hand once more reaching out to take Hannibal's. "How much I've always loved you. I was too much of a coward to realize it until we hit that water though."

"Will-"

"Please tell me that the feeling is mutual!" Will pleaded, pushing himself up and onto his knees so he could be closer to the cannibal despite the deep ache in them. "I can feel it on you, but please put it into words. Please."

Hannibal shook his head and pushed himself from the bed, a hand reaching out to carefully guide Will back into the mattress. "Now is not the time for this," Hannibal scolded. "You need rest."

"There will never be a good time for this, Hannibal," Will shot back, fighting against the hold on his good shoulder. "If what you said is true, then this might be the only time we have."

"There's always more time," Hannibal whispered in pain, pressure once more added to Will's shoulder, but the investigator didn't so much as budge.

"Hannibal," Will whispered, hand reaching out to take the man's cheek. Ruby red eyes flickered to meet his and Will sighed with a frown at how desperate Hannibal's eyes were. Pleading that he would just let the conversation drop, just let everything go so that Hannibal didn't have to live through it one more time. "What's the usual outcome of this conversation?"

"A weapon in your hand until you relapse and I have to put you under again to keep you calm," Hannibal explained, letting his hold on Will's shoulder drop, though he didn't pull from the hand on his cheek. In fact, Will was certain that the man leaned into it with a relieved sort of sigh.

"And the unusual?"

Hannibal stiffened at that and this time did try to move out of Will's grasp, but Will's other hand shot out, snatching up the man's knit sweater. Will groaned at the pain in his shoulder, but he pushed it aside with clenched teeth, keeping his eyes firm on Hannibal.

"You ask me to stay the night with you."

"And do you?"

"Sometimes," Hannibal admitted guiltily and Will shook his head at the idea of Hannibal feeling guilty. When had the man ever been guilty? Guilt wasn't a feeling that Will thought the man could possess, but there it was, rolling off of him in waves that made Will dizzy. "You never remember in the morning."

Will licked his lips with an apologetic expression that he hoped Hannibal understood. "Stay with me tonight."

Hannibal inhaled sharply and shook his head, once more attempting to pull from Will's grip. Will held strong. "Don't play games like this with me, cunning boy. You won't enjoy the outcome," Hannibal warned through his teeth, the jab more to protect himself.

"Not a game Hannibal. Not tonight. No games," Will whispered, pulling on Hannibal's sweater now with both hands. Hannibal stood still for a moment before his body caved and he let Will drag him forward. "I'm tired of fighting this," Will continued on as he leaned back, pulling Hannibal along with him until Hannibal was over the top of him, hands and knees on either side of Will's body. "I just want you to understand."

"I understand," Hannibal assured, eyes flickering over Will's face.

"You're the only one who has ever seen me." Will pulled once more on Hannibal's sweater and Hannibal gave a confused look. "What else do we do when the unusual happens?"

"Nothing," Hannibal said, head bowing to not have to meet Will's gaze anymore. "You sleep in my arms and I stay awake, watching you, waiting for your mind to snap again."

"Do you ever keep me awake?"

Hannibal licked his lips with a nod. "It does nothing. You only last a few hours before everything resets again."

Will frowned and tugged again at Hannibal's sweater until Hannibal's forehead was pressed into his own. Will closed his eyes and inhaled deeply of the old books and wine on Hannibal's skin. His *hands slowly released their grip in the knit fabric and he held his breath, waiting for Hannibal to take the opportunity to run, but when the monster didn't, Will slid his arms around Hannibal's shoulders, fingers tangling in Hannibal's shorter hair.*

"What's the longest I've stayed with you?"

Hannibal tensed once more, but Will kept his hold tight, not allowing the man the chance to escape. Not now. Not anymore. No more running, no more hiding, no more fighting. They would fix this, together. They would make this work. No more death, no more blood, just them.

"Two days at most," was the reply and Will sighed deeply.

"I'm sorry, Hannibal. I can't imagine how hard this is for you." Will's fingers carded through silky locks of silver. "You don't have to stay with me in the morning. You can leave. I don't want to deny you your life or your freedom."

There was a cracked noise from the back of Hannibal's throat and Will opened his eyes at something wet and warm against his cheek. He pushed Hannibal back, shocked to find tears on the man's cheeks.

Hannibal Lecter didn't cry. Hannibal Lecter was a masked monster who terrified God. Hannibal Lecter... Was a completely broken human. A shattered man that Will continued to smash with a hammer. Hannibal Lecter was a beautiful cacophony of the unknown and the macabre and Will had never been so hopelessly lost in another human being before in his life and he never wanted to fight and find another. There would never be another Hannibal Lecter.

"Hannibal?" Will asked.

"Yes, Will?" the man asked, a hand reaching up to wipe at his cheeks before being placed back against the mattress.

"I love you."

"Will," Hannibal begged in a choked voice, shaking his head. "Please, no."

"I need you to understand. I need you to remember that I love you," Will argued, a hand taking Hannibal's cheek to bring the man's attention back to his face. Maroon met blue weakly. "I need you to know that no matter what I do to you, I love you."

"Will-"

"It's because I love you that I hurt you, that I hurt us." Will wasn't sure where the words were coming from, but they made sense. They were the truth, in and out, forwards and backwards, upside down and right side up. "We terrify me, but I don't want to be scared of us right now."

"I really can't do this, Will," Hannibal warned once more, limbs beginning to tremble. Will frowned and turned so that Hannibal's body fell beside his in the bed. Will rolled himself over the top of Hannibal and straddled the elder's hips. Hannibal stared up through the darkness with wide eyes and with another crack of lightning and roll of thunder, Will could see the exhaustion and pain in the man's face. "Please," Hannibal begged, word barely audible. "I can't-"

"Do you love me, Hannibal?" Will asked, leaning over the killer until they were close enough that their breathing mixed. Lips stayed sealed and eyes petitioned for Will's cease and desist. Will wasn't exactly sure how much further he could keep pushing, but the nagging need in the back of his head wouldn't let him stop. Not until he had a certain answer. "Do you love me?" Hannibal shook his head, biting his lips between his teeth but it only made a small smile pull at Will's lips. "Do you love me, Hannibal? I would hate to have the only confirmation of the affirmative be some backhanded comment from Bedelia."

"Bedelia?" Hannibal asked, head tipping to the side. "When did she-"

"She told me that you felt a daily stab of hunger for me, Hannibal." One of Will's hands reached up and caressed over sharp cheekbones. Hannibal stilled under Will, the nervous humming energy under his skin going silent as eyes watched Will suspiciously. "And I told her that I ached for you." Hannibal's jaw went slack for a moment and Will couldn't help the idea that Hannibal's guard being down was endearing. "Is that a term you would understand better than love? Do you hunger for me Hannibal?"

"Every moment of every day," Hannibal answered finally, each word struggling to leave his lips. "But, Will, I don't think-"

"Shh," Will hushed, fingers still tracing over Hannibal's glass cutting features. "Promise that if I don't remember in the morning that you'll move on without me. I don't want to hold you back anymore."

"I can't promise that."

"Promise that you'll put yourself first. Promise that if it comes down to it that you'll pick yourself over me," Will pushed.

"No."

"Then promise me something else?" Will asked softly, forehead resting against Hannibal's as an exhaustion finally began to pull at his weakened body. "Promise to love me the rest of your life?"

"I promise," Hannibal replied thickly. "Please rest now, silly boy. You need it."

"One last question, Hannibal," Will insisted softly, sitting up just enough to fully look over Hannibal again. There was a little huff of air through Hannibal's nose and Will smiled lightly. "On these unusual nights, have we ever...?"

Will found that his actions were enough for both the rest of his question and for the answer. He leaned forward and pressed his lips to Hannibal's, a sigh leaving him before he could hold it back, the feeling of Finally *seeping through every pore in his body.*

Hannibal went rigid before slowly returning the kiss, hands tangling into Will's t-shirt, desperate in their attempt to pull Will closer. He trembled beneath Will and Will pulled back, breathing hard.

"No," Hannibal gasped out, eyes closed. He licked at his lips and Will watched the movement with a shiver. "Never."

"Can I kiss you again?" Will blurted out before he could hold the words back. He bit his tongue, a flush coming to his cheeks. A grin painted itself over Hannibal's lips as maroon depths opened to

drown Will with a light and damning chuckle.

"You can never do anything else ever again."

"You should have slit his throat when you had the chance," Molly pressed, words swirling around Will's head and the only thing that Will could hear. "You could never kill him though, could you? You're weak! A spineless, twitchy little man!"

"Can I do it?" Will asked and Hannibal paused, straight blade razor slowly lowering back to the counter.

"Do you know how to do it?" Hannibal asked with hesitation in his tone. Could he tell? Will had been so careful. There was no way that Hannibal should be able to tell yet. Will still had a good twenty minutes before the effects of the pills he had taken would kick in.

"My dad did teach me to shave, Hannibal," Will said with a laugh, stepping closer to Hannibal. Hannibal watched him carefully, eyes tight on Will's movements, but he slowly surrendered.

"Alright."

Will grinned, a just feeling thumbing through his veins. He hopped up onto the bathroom counter and pulled Hannibal between his legs, kissing Hannibal's head to avoid the shaving cream that was already over Hannibal's cheeks. Hannibal held out the straight razor and Will took it into his hand, his other working on finding a towel. He tossed the fabric over his shoulder and then turned on the sink, testing the water to make sure it was a decent enough temperature before looking over Hannibal carefully.

"You like your sideburns at the bottom of your ear, right?" Will asked, a hand reaching out to tip Hannibal's face to the left. His fingers pulled at the skin to keep it taut and he paused for a moment after a small hum in answer. "I love you," Will whispered, leaning over to press a kiss to Hannibal's temple. "Please remember that."

"Will, I-"

"Quiet, Dr. Lecter," Will interrupted, voice a bit more cheerful. "I need to concentrate. I don't want to nick you." Will angled the blade and slowly dragged it against Hannibal's skin in tiny, smooth strokes. He rinsed and repeated, making sure to keep Hannibal's skin pulled tight as he worked over sharp features. "You're so handsome."

"Will," Hannibal muttered. "You're being uncomfortably sentimental today."

"I can't compliment you?" Will asked curiously as he leaned over to wash off the blade in the sink before returning to Hannibal's face, skin smooth where it was now exposed from the heavy white cream over the rest of his face. Will's hand paused as he reached Hannibal's chin, a numbness coming to his fingers. He tried to push the feeling away and gave Hannibal a tight smile at a concerned look. He just had to hold on a little longer. Just a little longer and all of this would be over. "I didn't think you would be disagreeable to an ego stroke."

Hannibal's head tipped back and Will made sure that his hand was careful as he worked the razor over Hannibal's neck. He could feel the tenseness radiating off the man and noted the way that Hannibal's hands were clutching the counter on either side of Will's thighs for a lifeline.

Only a little longer, Hannibal, *Will thought.* This will be over and done with in a little while. I would never dream of you being covered in shaving cream on your deathbed. You deserve to look as handsome as the day we met when I finally end you.

Will continued on in silence, stopping every now and then to inspect his work. Once done, he cleaned the blade off in the sink and set it aside, pulling the towel from his shoulder and used it to wipe at the remnant of shaving cream on Hannibal's face.

Will leaned forward and kissed Hannibal the moment the towel was pulled away. His legs kept a tight grip around Hannibal's waist and his hand slipped back along the counter until he found the straight razor. He placed it back in his hand and lifted it up, pressing it to Hannibal's throat.

Hannibal broke the kiss with a small sigh that had a hint of boredom in it, as if this wasn't the first time that Will had played with his emotions to get to the end of whatever was between them.

Hannibal didn't move as Will increased the pressure. Will watched as blood slowly trickled down Hannibal's neck. He hesitated and Hannibal's lips tipped into a smirk.

"Don't stop now, Will. You're beautiful in your judging and sentencing," Hannibal whispered in complete acceptance of the fate that Will had planned for him. "Carry out your sentence, dear boy. Finish what you started."

"I really do love you," Will whispered, tipping his head against Hannibal's, though the blade didn't move. Hannibal pushed closer and Will winced, trying to pull his hand back, take back what he was doing, but Hannibal's hand took his wrist and held the blade flush against his neck. "I-I don't want this anymore, Hannibal. I'm sorry."

"I want to see your design. What did you have planned for us? What were you going to do once I was dead?"

A kiss was pressed to Will's lips and Will sighed into it, doing his best to hold back tears. His heart pounded in his chest painfully and that numbness that had been in his fingertips was spreading. His feet and hands and the tip of his nose were numb now and his head swam. The blade dropped from his hand, clanking as it fell to the ground and he pulled back from the kiss, the need to empty his stomach involuntary.

"I'm gonna be..." Will's arm wrapped around his middle and Hannibal didn't need to be told twice. Hannibal grabbed the small garbage can under the sink and passed it to Will, who snatched it up and emptied his stomach into it. Hannibal's fingers made gentle work of brushing through Will's curl's soothingly, curls that were slowly becoming damp with sweat.

"What did you take, Will?" Hannibal asked calmly, softly.

"Fentanyl," Will gasped out around the way his stomach was trying to empty itself.

"You're not going to like having another tube down your throat, foolish boy," Hannibal scolded lightly. "Let's get you taken care of. You're going to need to rest and you'll be sore after."

“You’re going to pump my stomach?”

“I’m not about to let you die, Will.”

“You shouldn’t have come back, Will,” Molly whispered. “You shouldn’t have come back after everything.”

“I didn’t have a choice,” Will argued back desperately, body swaying with the pain pulsing through his head. “I couldn’t remember.”

“Not then. When you went back to help Jack. You shouldn’t have come home. Now I’m dead and my son is going to suffer at the hands of this cannibal.”

“Hannibal won’t hurt him!” Will argued. “He promised to take care of us.”

“Like you promised to when you married me, Will?”

Mylimasis: **precious**

Stiprybės, mano brangiausias: **Strength, my dearest.**

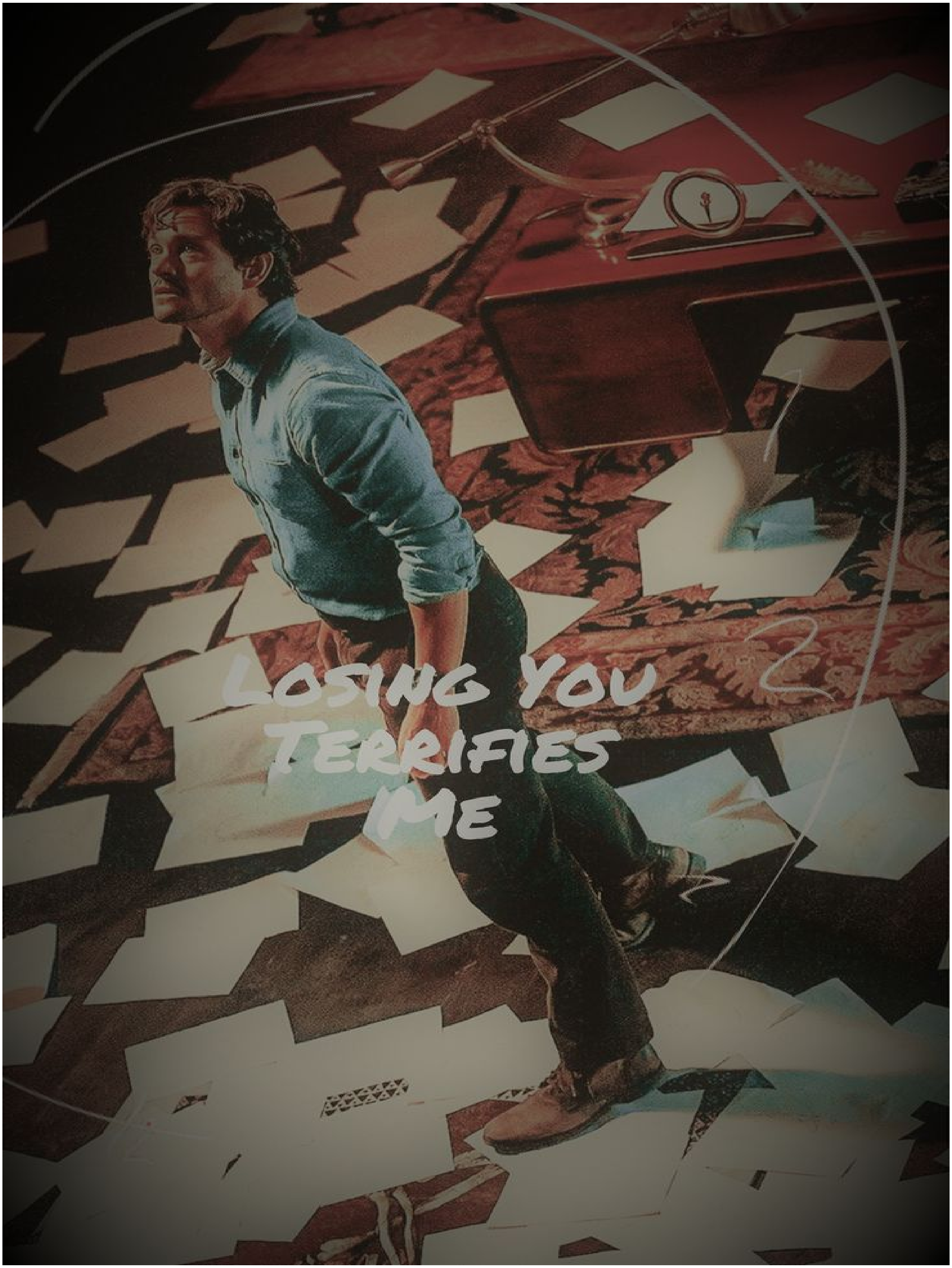
Chapter End Notes

If the changes between memories and life need to be separated more, please let me know and I will add separations to keep it clear. Thanks!

Chapter 37

Chapter Summary

> "And..." Walter trailed off, looking down at where his hands were still holding Will's wrist. Will and Hannibal both waited patiently. "Did..." Walter licked at his lips and tipped his head side to side. "Did you kill that man? The one on the cliff?"


Losing You
Terrifies
Me

It would be a lie if Hannibal said he hadn’t been expecting this. He had been steeling himself for the day when Will would ultimately relapse again. Nothing good ever lasted long for Hannibal and he had allowed himself to grow far too comfortable in the ease that had been set.

Hannibal guided Will’s zombie-like body back down the stairs and out to the car. Nothing here was important enough to waste time on. Not even that God fucking black notebook was worth any of this. Why had his darling boy picked right then to read it? It should be burned. It always brought Will’s mind crashing back down.

Hannibal sighed as he pulled from the driveway and started down the road that was wet from melting snow, the days finally beginning to give way to spring. His fingers drummed the steering wheel as he tried to think of all of his options. He didn’t have many. He could stay and start the whole thing over or he could leave and actually commit this time.

Hannibal wasn’t stupid. He knew he was the cause of Will’s instability. It only got worse the longer they stayed together despite how badly Hannibal tried to keep Will's head intact now more than ever.

The roads were muscle memory now. Long and trailing through fields and cities alike until he found himself pulling up a gravel drive and stopping his car at a fountain. The car was put in park and Hannibal closed his eyes before glancing over to Will who was still clutching to his head, jaw clenched tight.

“Will?” Hannibal asked softly, heart cracking in his chest as he waited for the answer from the boy.

“All of it’s there, Hannibal,” Will whispered, blue eyes full of tears darting up from their blank stare to meet Hannibal’s. “It hurts, Hannibal. All of it hurts.”

Hannibal leaned over, a hand brushing through Will’s curls the best he could with Will’s impeding hands in the way. “You’re doing far better now than you usually do,” Hannibal whispered. “Please, please don’t give up on us. Please.”

“The-The straight razor and the stairs and-and the-”

“I know,” Hannibal assured softly, his throat tight as he gave a weak and pitiable smile. He pressed a careful kiss to Will’s temple and sighed, closing his eyes. “It’s alright, Will. It’s always been alright.”

There was a pained laugh torn from Will’s throat and tears fell down his cheeks. “I-I have so many conflicting emotions going on right now and I don’t know if they’re mine or yours.” The back of Will’s hand wiped at his mouth as drool wetted his lips. “I love you so much Hannibal, but I just-I want-” Will’s voice broke. “-I want us dead.” Will’s hand covered his mouth and he slouched out of Hannibal’s grip. “We can’t... We-we-”

“Will,” Hannibal said sternly, though his voice cracked. Hannibal cleared his throat. “Not right now. Please.” Hannibal took one of Will’s hands and brought it to his lips, kissing at Will’s knuckles and then over the ring on his finger. “Can we please get our son and go? That’s all I want. Just like we planned.”

“After all of the-” Will cleared his throat, eyes once more looking out of the windshield as he pulled his hand from Hannibal’s grip. “After all of the things that I’ve done to you-to-to us and you still want to run away with me?”

“Always.” Hannibal’s eyes wandered carefully over the empath who sat devastated in his seat and Hannibal didn’t feel far off. They had been so close. Why had he let Will go back to that house? Why had he let Will beg to grab their things? Their stupid book and fishing lures and some things of Walter’s? Because he loved Will, that was why. “Will?” he asked, mouth sticky. Will shook his head, his index finger being bitten between his teeth. “Look at me Will.” Blue eyes obeyed, hurt and bloodshot, breath ragged. “Promise me something, alright?”

Will straightened up in his seat and Hannibal took that to mean that Will was openly considering what Hannibal was about to ask of him, despite the battling emotions that raged war across his features. Hannibal reached out and brushed at a tear stained cheek with a deep breath.

“Give us tonight. We’ll stay here. You think things over, try to hold on for me. If, by morning, you still feel this way then we’ll end it.”

“That sounds very Romeo and Juliet, Dr. Lecter,” Will tried to tease, but it came out choked and weak. Hannibal gave a teary chuckle all the same. “I didn’t think you were a fan of that story.”

“I would much rather compare us to something like Symphonie Fantastique.”

“I’m afraid I’m not familiar.”

“Through its movements, it tells the story of an artist's self-destructive passion for a beautiful woman. The symphony describes his obsession and dreams, tantrums and moments of tenderness, and visions of suicide and murder, ecstasy and despair.”

“I will regret never having heard such a thing,” Will teased before he winced, his hand once more going to his head. His eyes snapped shut and he groaned.

Hannibal sighed and once more caressed a hand over Will’s curls. “Do you promise to give me tonight?”

“I promise Hannibal,” Will assured. “I’ll stay my hand tonight.”

“Thank you darling boy. This will be the last time, I promise.” Hannibal pulled the keys from the ignition and glanced back up at the large house and thought over exactly what he had just promised himself to. “Let’s get you into bed and have you rest. I’ll make sure you have some good medicine to help with your migraine.”

“No medicine, Hannibal,” Will argued, a little breathless as he leaned forward, head in his hands. “I don’t want to be foggy anymore.”

“Will, I-”

“Hannibal.” Will sighed and looked up once more, tears still spilling from his devastatingly blue eyes. “For the first time in nearly half a year my head isn’t some jumbled mess with missing parts. Please let me have this. Let me sit in this. I need to do this without drugs or alcohol or anything else. Please.”

Hannibal gave a single nod, unsure he could make any sound come from his mouth at the moment as he looked over his cunning husband. His beautiful tear stained husband who was wearing the same suit he had been wearing yesterday when they had promised each other until death and

Hannibal's chest grew tight at the idea that death would be coming far sooner than he thought it ever would.

Will removed himself from the car, a hand taking the hood to keep himself upright and Hannibal slowly followed, catching Will as Will stumbled up the gravel driveway. He straightened Will upright and kept a firm grip around the man's waist as they shakily made their way to the door.

"Dad!" an excited voice said as the door was flung open. There was a stiffness in Will's stance as the child raced forward and hugged him. Will caressed the boy's head and sighed before slowly lowering himself to his knees. He pushed Walter back and looked over his son's sunny face. His hair was a mess, looking like it had yet to be combed and his freckles splattered over his nose in a familiar pattern that Will found comfort in at the moment. The boy's smile dropped and concern filled his light brown eyes. "Dad, are you alright?"

Will tried to give his son a smile, but he was certain that it didn't work quite as well as he hoped it would. "I have a bit of a headache," Will replied in a barely whispered voice. "I just need some rest is all. I'll be fine after."

"Ok," Walter accepted, though his tone held uncertainty in it. His eyes left Will and Hannibal met the gaze that was cast on him from the child. Hannibal wasn't honestly sure what to do or say to the kid after their last contact had ended on a rather unfortunate note. "*Kaip aš tave vadinu?*" (What do I call you?) Walter asked in Hannibal's mother tongue and Hannibal tipped his head to the side, still trapped in the oddness of the child. "*Tėtis? Tėvas? Pone?*" (Dad? Father? Sir?) Hannibal inhaled deeply as he considered the words, having not put much thought into them in the recent past, or in any part of his past really. "Hanni?"

Hannibal frowned at the name, disliking the way it fell from the child's tongue. The only reason that Morgan got away with the name was due to his age, Walter wouldn't be allowed the same courtesy. Walter needed to learn a decent amount of respect if they were going to make this work and it would be like trying to snap a femur, but the child would learn.

"Wally," Will scolded, though the look on his face told Hannibal that Will didn't have a clue as to the words that Walter had put into the world between them, though he was certain that Will had grasped the concept from the curtly said nickname and Hannibal's reaction that turned Walter's face smug. "You know better."

"That's quite alright, Will," Hannibal assured with a small exhale, hand reaching down to card through Will's curls. "Hannibal or Sir is fine for the time being."

"*Tu niekada nebūsi mano tėvas.*" (You will never be my father.) The child's voice was fakely cheerful and the smile on his face was nowhere near to deserving in its faux warmth. *"Jūs taip pat nesate pakankamai tinkamas pakaitalas mano mamai."* (You're also not a good enough substitute for my mom.)

"I would never dream of taking Molly's place, Walter," Hannibal assured, using English purposefully so that Will would understand better. There was no reason to hide the contentment between the two of them. It was just something that they would have to work through and Hannibal was more than aware that it would be worked through for Will's sake. Walter and he did have that in common. They both would do anything for Will.

"Wally," Will whispered, a hand caressing the boy's cheek. "No one is going to replace your mother."

Walter didn't say anything, bright eyes glancing between Will and Hannibal for a moment more. "Maybe you should take a nap, dad. You look really sick."

Hannibal watched a weak smile come to Will's lips and he huffed out a breath of laughter with a nod. "Maybe you're right. What do you think, Dr. Lecter? Is our-" there was a sharp correction from Will, "-My son right?"

"Astute as ever," Hannibal answered, voice level and calm as those brown eyes once more met him. "We'll rest for today and be on our way tomorrow."

Walter glanced back at the house behind him with a small disappointed sigh. Hannibal followed the gaze, eyes stopping at a young Morgan hidden halfway behind the still open front door. At catching Hannibal's gaze the young boy hid further behind the door with a small smile and giggle.

"Hello Morgan," Hannibal greeted with a bow of his head. "I promise we don't bite. Come on out."

"*Melagis*," Walter grumbled. (Liar.)

Hannibal let the comment slide and watched as Morgan bounded from behind the door and landed next to Walter with a bright smile. "Hi, Hanni!" he said happily. "Hi, Will."

"Good morning, Morgan," Will answered softly with a gentle grin.

"You get to stay another night, Wally!" Morgan said excitedly, bouncing on his feet beside Walter. Will gave a small smile at Walter's frayed sigh. "That means you can show me-"

"Morgan," Hannibal interrupted kindly, calling Walter's eyes to Hannibal. "How about you and I make something in the kitchen and let the two of them talk for a bit?"

Morgan's smile dipped slightly and he looked to Walter as if asking permission. Walter rolled his eyes and gave a nod and Morgan grinned, stepping closer and snatching up Hannibal's hand, tugging on it. Hannibal followed along, stopping when Morgan turned back to him, looking over the ring on his finger with a new bright smile.

"Will remembered?" Morgan asked, voice bubbly.

"Yes, Morgan," Will replied with a small nod and a wince. "I remembered."

"Are you Wally's dad now, Hanni?" Morgan pressed on. There was a low growl from Walter and Will sighed, ruffling the child's dark hair. Morgan glanced between the three silent people and there must have been some level of understanding because the boy just nodded and tugged on Hannibal's hand again. "Can we make chocolate pudding?"

"Certainly," Hannibal answered, letting himself be pulled into the house.

Will waited for them to leave before he let out a deep breath, head pounding away. He pushed himself back to his feet, something swirling dangerously in his gut and causing a wave of nausea to envelope him. He couldn't tell that he had stumbled over until his son's hands were pressed against his torso to keep him upright.

"Dad?" Walter asked in concern, staggering under Will's weight. "You're not ok."

“I really just need rest, Wally,” Will assured despite the way the world spun around him and the way his throat closed up around the bile that was threatening to force its way from his stomach.

“Let me get Hannibal. He’ll-”

“I’m alright,” Will pressed, giving Walter a kind smile. “Just let me sleep for a few hours.”

“Hannibal!” Walter shouted through the open doorway.

Will couldn’t quite place what was happening until he was being lowered into the plushness of a mattress. His skin was on fire, pins and needles with every touch. His restrictive clothing was pulled from his body before a simple sheet was placed over the top of him. Will’s eyes squeezed shut and his jaw ached with how hard he clenched his teeth as his fingers dug into his hair, trying to keep his skull from splitting in half. He was a prisoner, caged in his own pain.

A lightning hot touch snatched up his arm and Will tried to pull free until long and artistic fingers found a certain pressure point in his wrist that made Will gasp out in relief, tears rolling down his cheek.

“Would you please take some medicine, *mylimas*?” a soft, accented voice asked through the break in the storm. Each breath was no longer hot. A coldness was sinking into Will’s lungs and he no longer felt smothered. “Please let me help-”

“N-No,” Will stuttered out, shaking his head. He forced his eyes open and glanced around the dim and blurry room. His head was pressed against a heartbeat and there were worried eyes on him. More than one pair of worried eyes.

“Come along boys,” Margot’s voice instructed.

“But dad-”

“Let your dad rest,” Alana’s voice interrupted Walter and Will frowned.

“He can stay,” Will said, sitting up from where he was curled into Hannibal’s chest.

“Will-”

“I want him to stay,” Will cut into Hannibal’s sentence, something desperate in his voice. Walter’s bright brown eyes were surprised as he looked up at his dad and he gave a small nod in understanding.

“He can stay if you promise to rest,” Hannibal bargained, his free arm reaching up to wrap around Will’s shoulder to tug the empath back against him. Will couldn’t fight. His body wasn’t his. Not at the moment. It was slave to a migraine that was beating down the door that Hannibal had carefully sealed up with a grip that was slowly making Will’s fingers tingle. “If you’re not going to take medicine, you need to rest.”

“Will?” Morgan asked, pulling from Margot’s grip on his shoulder and racing to the bedside, hands clutching the sheets. “Would you like some of the chocolate pudding Hanni and I made? Mother said that it made her feel better after a hard day working. Maybe it will make you feel better too?”

Will smiled from where he hid himself in his husband's soft knit sweater. His mind was a jumbled mess. Fucking hell, he couldn’t think straight. Would he ever be able to think straight again? “I would like that very much, Morgan," Will answered softly, causing Alana to frown but Margot to smile. "Would you get me a giant bowl?"

"Yes!" he answered excitedly, letting go of the sheets and racing over to Margot who led him from the room.

"Why don't you go help?" Alana asked towards Walter who still looked surprised from Will's words.

"Stop trying to dismiss my son, Alana," Will grumbled, letting his eyes fall closed as he listened to Hannibal's steady heartbeats. "If I didn't want him here I would have him leave."

Alana gave an offended look, mouth opening and closing several times before she sighed. "You need your rest, Will. I-"

"I think Will has been more than clear, Alana," Hannibal cut in, letting his free fingers brush through Will's hair. Will sighed into the touch and Hannibal pressed a kiss to Will's head. The man was far more relaxed now, no longer curled up in a whimpering and shaking ball. No longer begging for death in a voice so loud it had scared the children. "I would appreciate it if you could give us a moment. Alana, would be so kind?"

Will opened his eyes to see what type of expression covered the woman's face. Something akin to anger was there for a short moment before a short huff of air through her nose and a firm nod gave way to something blank before she turned away from the bed. Walter looked after her and waited for the door to close before he turned to Hannibal with a curious look.

"I've been trying to get her to leave me alone for weeks. How did you do that?" the boy asked in shock, stepping closer to the bed.

"She's afraid of me," Hannibal replied simply, looking like he was going to say more, but stopped as Will's hand fisted itself into Hannibal's sweater.

"Hannibal," Will groaned against Hannibal's chest with a small shake of his head. "Please. Not around him."

"Forgive me," Hannibal muttered, resting his cheek against Will's curls. His eyes wandered over to Walter who had once more crept closer to the bed in curiosity.

"What are you doing to him?" Walter's head tipped to a slightly better angle to look over the way that Hannibal's hand was holding Will's wrist, thumb pressed tightly into Will's forearm.

"There's a pressure point in your wrist that helps with migraines and headaches," Hannibal explained softly. "The effect is almost instant, but it only lasts as long as you hold to the pressure point."

"That's weird," Walter muttered, finally sitting on the edge of the bed. "How do you do it?"

"Are you alright if he tries, love?" Hannibal asked softly and Will inhaled deeply with a nod, sitting up a little more. They shifted positions until Walter was on the other side of Will and Hannibal released his grip on Will's wrist. Will hissed in a sharp breath and his head fell back against the headboard. Hannibal guided Walter's hands to where they needed to be. "Add pressure right there. Hold tight."

Walter's eyes flickered up at a small gasp from Will, afraid that he had hurt his dad, but at a tired smile and a ruffling of his hair, Walter relaxed. Will's head tipped back against Hannibal and Walter glanced between the two of them, trying to take in the way that the collected killer from dinner a few weeks before was a kind and affectionate man who was taking care of his dad.

Gentle caresses and kisses. Whispered words that Walter couldn't exactly hear. Words he wasn't sure he wanted to hear.

"Dad, can you cut the shit and tell me what's wrong?" Walter grumbled, calling both pairs of eyes to him.

"Language," Hannibal scolded and Walter's mouth dropped open in disbelief. He knew he was meant to obey. He knew that if he didn't he was as good as dead, but he just couldn't seem to come to his senses enough to do just that.

"Dad," Walter grumbled. "You aren't actually serious, are you? I don't have to listen to-"

"You shouldn't be swearing," Will cut in with a smile. "Not at your age, damn it." Walter grinned, eyes immediately going to a hard frown on Hannibal's features. "Try to clean it up, Wally. It's unsightly." Walter gave a small nod, eyes firm on Hannibal's face. “I really just have a migraine.”

“Fucking bullshit,” Walter argued, the words coming from his mouth before he could stop them. “What is wrong with you? I’ve seen you with migraines. This isn't just a migraine.”

“Will, if we can no longer lie to each other, please do not lie to the child,” Hannibal instructed softly, pressing a kiss to Will’s head and Walter frowned at the action. It would take some getting used to. Not some. A lot. A lot of getting used to. But if Will was happy then Walter could be happy. “When your dad remembers things he often suffers from migraines.”

“So you remembered then?” Walter asked in a kinder tone. “You remembered all of it?”

Will gave a light smile. “All of it.”

“And...” Walter trailed off, looking down at where his hands were still holding Will’s wrist, an ache in his thumb from holding the position for so long. Will and Hannibal both waited patiently. “Did...” Walter licked at his lips and tipped his head side to side. “Did you kill that man? The one on the cliff?”

“They found the body?” Hannibal asked softly, glancing down at Will.

“Tattle-Crime says that it was you,” Walter pressed on, not meeting his parents’ gazes. “But there hasn’t been mention of a warrant and anything for your arrest. At least, not in the news. They said your blood was all over the place though.” Walter gave a weak laugh and finally glanced up from beneath his eye lashes. “You did it, didn’t you? Both of you?”

“Would it help your opinion of me if I told you it was self-defense?” Will asked curiously, fear swirling through him. This was going to be the turning point. This was going to be where he lost Walter if he hadn’t already. Will was quite shocked that Walter was near him at all, keeping in physical closeness with what Will had just said. “Because I’m not going to lie to you and tell you I didn’t do it.”

“Alright,” Walter says after a moment of silence. He inhaled deeply with a small nod, eyes looking carefully over Will before they flickered back over to Hannibal. “Self-defense?”

“Yes,” Hannibal agreed.

“Alright,” Walter repeated, leaning back on the bed to lay beside Will. He curled into Will’s arm and Will sighed, reaching out and gently carding his fingers through his son’s hair. “Do you remember what I told you at the hospital that night Mom and I ran from him?”

Will’s eyes closed and he sighed with a shake of his head, looking as if to be on the edge of sleep. “Help me, son,” he instructed in a gentle tone, fingers coming to a stop in Walter’s hair and slowly lowering to the bedside. Will adjusted himself slightly against Hannibal and exhaled deeply.

“I told you that because he wasn’t going to stop that you should kill him,” Walter answered, once more catching Hannibal’s attention.

“Is that so?” Hannibal asked curiously, eyeing Walter carefully.

“I did,” Walter answered softly, light brown eyes flickering over Hannibal hesitantly.

“May I ask why?”

Walter was silent for a moment, eyes moving back over to Will to take in the man whose breathing had leveled out. “To protect our family,” Walter finally answered, receiving a slight smile from Will and an interested glint in Hannibal’s oddly colored eyes.

“It would have been enough to have him arrested,” Hannibal offered, words picked ever so perfectly, ready to dig through this child’s mind more fully than he had been able to. “He would never have been free.”

“Neither would you, Sir,” the small boy pointed out, a hint of dislike in his tone. “Yet, here you are, married to my dad.”

“I am not like the rest Walter.”

Walter nodded his head in agreement, his words slow as he thought over them, his own sentences picked just as carefully as Hannibal’s were. “No. You cover your tracks better than the rest, but only because you enjoy confusing people.” Hannibal gave a light grin at the observation. “In the end you let my dad know you.”

“Yes, Walter.”

“Walter,” Will warned, voice barely more than a whisper, his brows furrowed. “Please.”

“I’m not going to lie either, dad,” Walter grumbled, eyes sharp as they met Hannibal’s head on, reminding Hannibal so much of Will. Something strong and powerful. Hot with strength. Cinnamon if Hannibal had to put a name to it. “I don’t like him and I know he doesn’t like me.”

“Don’t I?”

“Do you?” Walter challenged back.

Hannibal thought over the question for a moment, a hand reaching up to card through Will's curls to help relax the stiffness that had once more taken over the man's body. "Hush, my love," Hannibal instructed softly in Will's ear. *"Atsipalaiduok. Tu esi saugus."* (Relax. You are safe.) Walter nearly snorted at the words with a roll of his eyes, but he held it back. "I'm afraid that I am still learning about you, Walter. Though in our time together you have demonstrated a high level of intelligence that I admire. Other than our harshness rather than an openness during our first meeting, I have found you likeable."

"I can be very likeable," Walter shot back, a bit of bite in his tone.

"So Morgan has told me," Hannibal said with a kind nod and a small chuckle. "Do you trust him? He has a rather high opinion of you."

"He's a child," Walter grumbled, a frown over taking his facial expression. "He has a high opinion of you as well, I doubt he's a good judge of character."

"However have you managed?"

"I tolerated him," Walter answered, doing his best to ignore the teasing that was in Hannibal's voice. "I mean, this is his house. His family has been kind to me. The least I can do is behave. I don't have means much elsewhere."

"For being someone who wants to be undeniably rude, you know how to keep yourself composed," Hannibal said with a smile he couldn't hold back.

"Aren't we all?" Walter mused.

"Not with the full comprehension of our conversation that you are showing me," Hannibal replied easily, glancing down at his husband whose hair Hannibal was still playing with. "You have quite an extraordinary child here, Will."

"He is quite remarkable," Will agreed in a whisper.

"He has potential if he wishes to seize it," Hannibal pressed on and Walter frowned at how the conversion had moved on without him as if he weren't in the room. "With proper training, schooling and etiquette the boy-"

"I'm not a dog," Walter blurted out, voice louder than he meant it. That smile. That damn smile that Hannibal gave him. Something so smug, something telling Walter that his reaction was exactly the one that Hannibal had been trying to get from him through this whole conversation. Something excited rather than controlled to only prove his point further.

"Hanni?" a small voice said from the door, a head poking out of it. He stepped a little further into the room, a bowl in hand. Walter looked over the boy curiously before glancing over to Hannibal and back to Morgan as Morgan approached the bed.

"Yes dear?" Hannibal asked back, a gentleness in his voice that Walter had only heard the man use with his own dad. So Hannibal liked Morgan more than Walter? What kind of shit was that? What the hell could Walter possibly do to get on Hannibal's good side? He had tried being good when they had first met. Had obeyed Hannibal right down to the letter, held intellectual conversations with the man, spoken in the man's natural language and nothing had given him a leg up. Nothing had endeared him. Not like the annoying little brat who somehow captured everyone's hearts while Walter simply turned them to stone. "What is it?"

"I brought Will the pudding," Morgan answered back, holding out the bowl and spoon towards the bed.

"Thank you Morgan," Will muttered with a smile as he opened his eyes and pushed himself into an upright position, taking the outheld bowl with his free hand that wasn't trapped up in Walter's still careful grip despite the way it was causing Walter's finger's to burn. "I feel better already."

"Oh, good," the boy said with a bright smile, hands clasping behind his back as he rocked on his feet. His attention quickly turned to Walter who frowned at what he knew was coming. "Wally, come play with me please?" And there was Morgan being himself as ever.

"No," Walter answered, a bit more harshness to his tone than he had meant it, some of his leftover anger from Hannibal bleeding into his words. He cleared his throat and shook his head at the sad look that took over Morgan's young features. "Uh, sorry," Walter quickly added. "I-I want to spend time with my dad right now. Later?"

"But Wally, you promised that we'd-"

"Later. I promise I will teach you how to play poker after dinner," Walter tried once more with a grimace. "Please let me spend time with my dad."

Morgan gave an overly dramatic sigh and turned his attention to Hannibal, his second favorite person in the room, voice down. *"Pouvez-vous me lire une histoire?" (*Can you read me a story?)

Walter gave a confused look at the switch in language and he had to assume that it was somehow to get back at him for shutting the boy down so quickly. Will looked just as lost as Walter felt.

"Je suis sûr que ta mère pourrait mieux le lire," (I'm sure your mother could read it better,) Hannibal answered back flawlessly, though there was confusion in his voice.

"Je préfère ton accent." (I prefer your accent.)

"I will be right back," Hannibal muttered, leaning over to press a kiss to Will's head. "Walter, if your hand starts to cramp, please relax it. Will can handle several minutes without the pressure point." Hannibal shifted himself from under Will and got to his feet, motioning for the small child to leave the room. Morgan's face brightened up instantly and he raced towards the door as Hannibal took his time straightening his sweater.

"Wait..." Walter called when Hannibal took a few steps away from the bed. The killer slowly turned back, silent as his eyes regarded Walter. "*Kodel su Morgan kalbi prancuziskai?*" (Why do you speak French with Morgan?)

Hannibal glanced back to the door that Morgan had rushed through before turning back to Walter and offering an answer in English and Walter had the sneaking suspicion that it was to spite Walter.

"If I had to guess, maybe because he wants to let you know he is smart too."

Hannibal left the room and Walter settled back into Will's side, something bitter in his mouth as he chewed on his tongue. Why did Walter need to gain or offer approval to some annoying kid that he disliked almost as much as he disliked Hannibal? Some four year old brat that was having far too much fun playing prince in his castle was not about to impress Walter just because the kid knew how to speak other languages.

“Wally,” Will whispered as he placed the untouched bowl of pudding aside. Will rested against the headboard and Walter shuffled closer to the one thing that was familiar in his life, despite the truth that had come out between them. This man was all that Walter had left now of his previous life and he would cling to it with all of his being.

“Yes dad?” Walter asked back, leaning his head against Will’s shoulder.

“Can you please give Hannibal a chance?”

“I don’t like him.” The words were blunt and sharp, but there was no point in lying. There was no point in trying to hide and pretend that everything between the three of them was going to be ok when it absolutely wasn’t going to be. Hannibal and Walter would always butt heads. Neither approved of the other, neither wanted the other near Will. It would always be a war between them and Walter wasn’t going to lose it. He could be just as stubborn as Hannibal was and he could prove it. He would prove it. Maybe then it would endear him to the man enough to not feel like some old forgotten left sock that had fallen between the washer and dryer.

“Why?”

The question was a simple one, but the weight that it held made Walter’s mouth go dry with the irrational answer that swam to the forefront of his head. An answer that was based fully in his own inadequate confidence rather than in any sort of fact.

“You love him more than me.”

“That’s not true,” Will objected, blue eyes sharp even under the cloudiness that still plagued them. “It’s... different.” Will sighed deeply. “The love between Hannibal and I is a different thing than what is between us. I will always love you, Wally. You’re my son. You will always come first.”

“It doesn’t feel that way,” Walter grumbled, fingers starting to twitch with the effort he was putting into them to keep a hold of Will’s pressure point, Will’s only saving grace. “What about him is so special?” Will licked his lips and Walter rolled his eyes. He knew what it meant when Will’s nose scrunched up before he was about to speak. He was going to dumb down everything for Walter to understand and it only made Walter’s blood boil. “I’m not a kid, dad. Fucking tell me.”

There was disapproval in those blue depths, but Will obliged. “When I am with him, I can be more myself than I ever have been.”

“A killer.”

Will winced. “No.” Will shook his head. “No. A better version of me. He has that ability with people. I’m pretty sure you will experience that too. Hannibal can reflect the best of yourself, not the worst.” Will reached out a hand and ruffled up Walter’s hair. “Wally, we could be a family if you would only let us be. And he’s not going to change things between us. We can still go fishing and camping. We can still watch the game and play catch in the yard.”

“You’ll still burn the bacon and make crunchy eggs?” Walter asked back.

Will laughed and his hand pushed gently at Walter’s head, causing the boy to smile. “If that’s truly what you want for breakfast, though I promise you that food will be far superior coming from Hannibal than it ever would be coming from me.” Walter’s heart tore a bit at the smile over his dad’s lips. The same sort of smile that Will had when he had first met his mom. A smile that had quickly vanished when the fighting had started. A smile that Walter wished was still for his mom and not for that man who had stolen Will away. “He will be good to you. I promise. And I want us to be a family. A proper family.”

“I would do anything for you dad,” Walter whispered.

“I know,” Will assured with a nod. “I just want you to do it for you.”

“Hannibal is not my mom.”

Will’s nod turned thoughtful and that smile fell a fraction. “I can assure you, Wally, he will never be anyone but Hannibal Lecter.”

“Dad? Can I keep your last name?” Walter questioned, quickly adding, “Only your last name?”

The answer was just as swift and just as comforting. “Of course.” Will pulled Walter closer and placed a kiss to the boy’s head. “You are mine and only mine until you want something different. If the day comes that you want to take Hannibal’s name, you can. If the day comes that you want to be adopted by Hannibal, we can also arrange that.” Walter shook his head and stuck out his tongue in dislike, causing Will to chuckle once more. “Only if you want, Wally.”

“Thank you dad.”

Kaip aš tave vadinu? Tėtis? Tėve? Pone?: What do I call you? Dad? Father? Sir?

Tu niekada nebūsi mano tėvas. Jūs taip pat nesate pakankamai tinkamas pakaitalas mano mamai.: You will never be my father. You’re also not a good enough substitute for my mom.

Melagis: Liar

mylimas: precious

Atsipalaiduok. Tu esi saugus: Relax. You are safe

Pouvez-vous me lire une histoire?: Can you read me a story

Je suis sûr que ta mère pourrait mieux le lire: I'm sure your mother could read it better

Je préfère ton accent: I prefer your accent

Kodel su Morgan kalbi prancuziskai?: Why do you speak French with Morgan?

Chapter 38

Chapter Summary

> Hannibal blinked at the words in interest, unable to stop the amused smile over his lips. “And tell me, Walter. How do you plan to do that?”
>
> “With my hands.”

Chapter Notes

> Sorry for the super super early update. I am going out of town in the morning. Hope you enjoy this chapter!

Losing You
Terrifies Me

“Look who’s here,” Margot said, pointing past Morgan and towards the door of the dining room. Hannibal watched from where he sat beside Alana as the child’s head whipped towards the door at a speed that should have snapped his neck with a smile that was so bright it would have put the sun to shame. “I bet he would teach you to play now.”

“Wally!” Morgan said, pushing himself from the dining table and racing to the boy, wrapping his arms around Walter’s middle.

Hannibal turned in his chair to observe as the annoyed look over Walter’s face was quickly washed away into something far more kind as Walter let Morgan hug him. He petted at Morgan’s head before pushing the boy away and guiding him towards the opposite end of the table. He pulled a pack of cards from his pocket and tossed them to Morgan before grabbing a plate of food that was set out.

Hannibal reached out and caught Walter’s hand and the boy froze, not looking up from the plate he was fixing himself that was close to overflowing as if food were scarce and he wasn’t sure when he was going to be able to eat again. How often had he gone without food? Surely Will would have seen to the boy having enough to be comfortable, especially after the conditions that Will had lived through.

“Where is your dad?” Hannibal asked.

With a surprising amount of strength, Walter ripped his hand free. “Asleep,” he answered, voice low and dark. “I made him take some Excedrin.”

Hannibal’s head tipped to the side curiously and he blinked several times as Walter continued to load roast beef and mashed potatoes onto his plate before smothering the whole thing in an absurd amount of gravy.

“You got him to take medicine?” Hannibal asked back.

“You say that like it’s hard to make people do what you want them to. I thought that was what you were supposed to be good at, Sir,” Walter grumbled around a large mouthful of a dinner roll before he passed by Hannibal’s chair and went to the other end of the table where Morgan had tried to shuffle the card deck and had made more of a fifty-two card mess.

Hannibal turned back to Margot who sipped on her glass of wine with wide and knowing eyes. “Sir?” she asked when she set her glass back down. Her voice was its usual softness, though it held a note to it that Hannibal couldn’t quite place, though he knew he didn’t like it. Not in the slightest. “That seems rather strict if you ask me.”

“We discussed it. I don’t mind,” Hannibal said, taking his own glass to swirl it before inhaling deeply of the cedar wood notes in the wine before sipping at the Cabernet Sauvignon. Margot’s brow raised and her fingernails clicked on the table as they tapped out a repeating pattern. “He is welcome to call me something else if he so desires.”

“And is he aware of that?”

“I thought Alana was the one who picked at minds, not you.”

“When she’s working I pick up the slack,” Margot shot back quickly with a smile, leaning over the table. “You’re not going to get anywhere with him like that.”

“I’m not sure if I want that relationship to go any further than that,” Hannibal admitted, placing his wine aside, finger trailing around the rim of the glass. “We’re at a comfortable enough distance.”

“As a parent, I can say that the distance won’t last,” Margot offered lightly, giving a long look over her own son who was laughing at something that Walter had done.

“My first parenting experience left much to be desired. I will guide from a distance if I am asked to do such. I’m not wanted.”

“Because you loved too much?”

“Perceptive as always, Margot.” Hannibal sighed, taking another sip of his wine as he cast his own gaze down the table and to where instead of a card game being played there was a card house being built.

“He’s not your sister.”

Hannibal's jaw tightened at the words that Margot let into the air between them and he discarded his wine glass with a thoughtful breath. "Both of them could be snatched away just as quickly." Hannibal watched as Walter blew on the small structure that Morgan had been working on and it tumbled back to the table. "I've sunk far too much into Will. I'm not about to do the same to a child who doesn't like me. I am a poor excuse for a beloved mother."

"He's accepted you," Margot offered in a thoughtful tone that had Hannibal frowning. "He has had you in his life from the moment he learned your name. He's kept you so close I would call him obsessed." There was a loud laugh from Morgan at the end of the table that drew Margot's attention for a moment. "He knows everything about you. Learned everything he could about you, for you."

"As a survival tool," Hannibal grumbled, watching as Walter's card house tumbled back to the table when Morgan stole one of the bottom cards.

"They don't teach Lithuanian in schools, Hannibal," Margot pointed out coolly. Hannibal caught a small smile from Margot before his eyes returned to the boy who ruffled at Morgan's hair and went back to building the card house. "He's a good kid, Hannibal. He's so kind to my son. And he's smart. Incredibly smart. I think you could grow to like him if you give him the time and energy it takes."

"He won't return it."

"You can't force him to," Margot answered with a huff of air and a roll of her blue eyes that belonged to the Verger name. "Alana is forceful. She means well, but she pushes too hard. He closes up. He'll come to you if he wants to talk. He's far more open if you let him do his thing."

"Thank you for the concern."

"The truth is," Margot said with a light smile shot in Hannibal's direction as she located her wine glass. "I am not concerned in the way that you believe I am. It's just..." she trailed off and took a sip of her drink.

"Yes?" Hannibal asked curiously.

"You might be surprised how much you and him are alike. You won't wonder why he's Will's son."

Hannibal shook his head. "Morgan is exceptional," he pointed out. "Walter is-"

"I guarantee you that Walter is too, just in a very different way." Margot set aside her glass, eyes once more set on her son. "He's still afraid of water, you know." The words made Hannibal pause and he nodded. It would only be natural for the boy to be afraid of water after what he had gone through. "Refuses to take a bath and won't take a shower unless one of us is with him."

"He'll grow out of it," Hannibal muttered, unsure if there was a point that Margot was trying to make.

"You cared enough to help him."

"I was simply making things even between us."

“Don’t play that card with me, Hannibal. I’ve seen the way you hold yourself around my son. You view him as your equal in every way.” Margot’s gaze was warm when she regarded Hannibal and Hannibal did his best to ignore the attention. “You owe Walter the same courtesy.”

“I never saw myself in a position to be a parent ever again,” Hannibal mused, hoping to direct the conversation in another direction, but finding it quite impossible. “But then again there was Abigail. I tried with her.”

“How hard did you try?”

“If I’m being honest, it was more for Will than for me...” Hannibal’s hand went to his mouth to cover his smile at how he was once more in the same situation and how much he hoped it didn’t play out like Abigail again. He could never begin to imagine how utterly destroyed Will would be if Walter’s throat was slashed in a kitchen and Walter was left to die.

“You can be better now,” Margot pointed out in a gentle tone. “He is younger and has more time to grow to know you.” There was a deep inhale from the woman that caught Hannibal’s attention. “Even if I didn’t know Abigail personally, I did come to know her through Alana’s

“That is true,” Hannibal admitted softly, giving a small nod, eyes once more focused on Walter whose cards had once more toppled in on themselves thanks to a pair of smaller and less coordinated hands. “I will give him that.”

“Your family will only survive if you see your son as your own, Hannibal. Will will grow to resent you if you do not show Walter the same love.”

Love. What had love ever done for Hannibal other than turn his life to absolute ruin? This boy would have to prove himself if he expected any of Hannibal’s respect to be given to him. Love was not in the cards. This was a business transaction and Hannibal was certain that Walter saw it the exact same way.

“What is Morgan reading nowadays?” Hannibal asked, hoping that he could finally move the subject on.

“The Great Gatsby,” Margot replied with a small nod. “He says he hasn’t finished it, but he’s been reading it for the better part of the time you’ve been gone. It took him less time to read the entirety of *Les Miserables*. I think he just likes the book.”

“You are going to ruin him.”

“How so?” Margot asked with a snorted laugh.

“He is going to be a hopeless romantic.”

“He already is.” The smile on Margot’s face was brighter than Hannibal could recall ever seeing the woman produce. “He looks at Walter like Walter’s the sun. It’ll be a shame that Walter has to leave. Maybe they can stay in contact. Letters would make Morgan rather happy.”

“You approve of them?” Hannibal asked curiously.

“I approve of them as much as Alana doesn’t.” Margot gave a small laugh.

“Do you know what Walter is reading? Does he read?”

Margot was silent, a furrow coming to her brows as she thought over the question. “He does read, though it’s mostly things on the computer when Alana allows him to use it. I think I saw him reading Virginia state laws and some things about FBI cases.”

Hannibal smirked. Walter was vindictive. There was hope for him to respect the boy after all.

“Are you going to miss your house?” Morgan asked, leaning dangerously over the table with his feet on the chair so he could add another card to the house they were building.

“No,” Walter muttered, waiting for the cards to cave in on themselves, but Morgan’s hands were becoming more steady much to Walter’s surprise. Morgan’s grin was bright as the structure shook but stayed upright. “I’m used to moving around a lot.”

“Are you going to miss your school?”

Walter shrugged, adding his own card to the house. “I don’t really like school. Any school would do.”

“Are you going to miss your friends?”

“What is this?” Walter asked back. “Twenty questions?”

Walter bit his tongue and closed his eyes as his mind wandered over to Danny who was hidden somewhere far away for his own protection. He could remember the information being relayed to his mom over the phone. He had snatched up the other side of the line and held his breath as he listened to the conversation.

Danny was sent to a juvenile-treatment facility nearly 2,000 miles away. A place that had witnessed countless difficult conversations between troubled children, their worried parents, and clinical therapists. And the reasons that had been given had only thrown Walter for a loop and he could hear the words that Danny had told him and he hadn’t put much of a thought to.

I wanted the whole world to myself, so I made a whole entire book about how to hurt people.

Maybe Walter had just been so focused on learning everything he could about Hannibal and finally being happy that he had a person who didn’t make fun of him want to be his friend that he hadn’t cared when Danny showed him the journal.

Danny had explained that since he was six he had been drawing weapons in this book. A knife, a bow and arrow, chemicals for poisoning, a plastic bag for suffocating. Danny had also told Walter about how he liked to suffocate his stuffed animals and would practice on them. How he had wanted to shove his model planes down Casey’s throat when Casey would discipline him.

It makes me happy because I thought that someday I was going to end up doing it on somebody.

“His behavior wasn’t impulsive,” the man on the phone had said. “It was very thoughtful, premeditated.”

Psychopath. Danny was a psychopath and his only friend. That wasn’t what the man on the phone had called him. He hadn’t given Danny an exact name. Danny simply had callous and unemotional traits, a cluster of characteristics and behaviors, including a lack of empathy, remorse, or guilt;

shallow emotions; aggression and even cruelty; and a seeming indifference to punishment. But Walter knew exactly what that meant. He had come across the term when researching Hannibal.

“No,” Walter finally decided, though he wasn’t sure if it was the truth. “I make friends easily.” That was a lie.

“That’s cool!” Morgan bounced in his chair, rocking the table and the cards once more collapsed. Morgan giggled, hands going to his mouth. “Sorry,” he muttered behind his fingers, but Walter only sighed with a shake of his head. He began scooping up the cards once more. “I don’t have many friends.”

“Don’t worry kid,” Walter said as kindly as he could. “You’ll have a ton of friends and you’ll forget me in no time.”

“No, I won’t.” Morgan’s hands lowered from his mouth and he smiled, all teeth. “I will remember you. I’ll miss you too.”

Walter frowned at the sentiment. “I will miss your mother.” Walter tapped the cards against the table to straighten them out. “She’s nice. I’ll miss your horses too.”

“They’re nice horses,” Morgan agreed with a firm nod. Walter smiled and reached out, ruffling up Morgan’s hair once more, the act having become so natural as a way to not have to answer what the boy said. “Do you know where you’re going?” There was excitement in that voice.

“I don’t and I am assuming they will not tell me. But if I have to guess we will be in Europe. Hannibal likes it there.”

“My moms talk a lot about sending me there one day. They have busi-busi-” Morgan gave a frustrated huff of hair that blew about his bangs. “Work friends in Germany that are important.”

“Of course they do,” Walter muttered with a sigh, shuffling the cards to give his hands something to do, the sound echoing out around the dining room.

“My mother wants me to go, but my mom doesn’t want me to.”

“Really?” Walter paused for a moment and looked over the boy who gave a small nod. “I thought it would be the other way around and Alana would want you to go.”

“Applesauce will miss you.”

The subject change was so swift it made Walter speechless for a small moment, curious how Morgan was able to jump from one train of thought to another so abruptly without getting whiplash.

“She likes my dad,” Walter pointed out. “Well, every dog in the world loves my dad.”

There was a small giggle from Morgan again and Walter felt a smile pull at his lips.

“I like him too.”

“I like your mother,” Walter repeated, trying desperately to move the conversation away from him. “She's pretty nice.”

“Hanni is super cool though!”

“Let’s trade.” What a simple fix that would be. Morgan could have Hannibal and Alana. They were both cold and brutal and Walter could have Will and Margot. How much kinder they would be to Walter. The two of them together would have been lovely.

“No,” Morgan answered quickly, a hand reaching out to Walter’s half eaten plate.

“You like Hannibal,” Walter pointed out as he pushed his plate closer for Morgan to grab the roll he had been eyeing. With it in hand, Morgan sat back on his knees and took a rather comically large bite of the roll.

“But I love my mother,” he got out through a muffled mouthful. “And also, I don’t think Will will leave Hannibal.”

“I don’t know.” There was more hope to his tone than Walter meant it to hold. “He really loves me.”

“Then you’re lucky!” Morgan twisted the roll in his hand with a smile before taking another large bite of it. “You won’t lose them.”

“I miss my mom,” Walter admitted under his breath, though he wasn’t sure he was heard until Morgan lowered the roll to the table.

“I’m sorry,” the boy said, bread crumbs spilling from his mouth. No wonder Alana wouldn’t allow Morgan to eat anywhere but the dining room. The kid was a mess.

Walter gave a small smile. “Do you think you’re going to have any siblings?”

“I hope so!” Morgan enthusiastically replied, roll being forgotten on the table cloth. “I would be a good big brother.”

“You?” Walter snorted, setting the cards aside and taking a bite of his mashed potatoes. “You would be incredibly boring.”

“I am not!” Morgan shot back with a frown.

“And what would you do with a little brother or sister? Read?”

“And teach them how to ride horses and we would speak in other languages. I will be an amazing grown up.”

“Says who?” Walter shot back at the defiance from the kid. He scooped up another large mouthful of potatoes and shoved them in his mouth, listening to the boy’s just as defensive reply.

“My moms.”

“You need to learn how to throw a baseball, kid.” Walter swallowed his bite before continuing. “You need to play video games and read comics.”

“I can read comics. I have nothing against those. It’s my mother who does.”

“You’re impossible.” Walter lowered the spoon back to his plate and tipped his head to the side.

“On the contrary, I am very capable.”

Walter laughed at the words, unsure if Morgan actually knew what he was saying or not, but finding that it didn't really matter, he let the subject drop. “Did you still want to learn how to play poker?”

“Yes!”

Sleep, while it normally seemed to be a sweet separation from the pounding in his head, was anything but. Nightmare after nightmare came and finally Will couldn’t stand laying in that dark room alone for another moment.

He pushed himself from the bed and stood on weak and trembling legs that he was grateful were supporting him. The first few steps were difficult and made his head throb dangerously. His hand clutched his head as he stepped out into the bright hallways, the light doing far more bad than good.

With eyes squinted up and watering from the pain, Will walked himself through the large house until he could hear voices from the dining room. When he pushed open the door he found a rather lively sight, two separate conversations happening on either side of the table. The two young boys were located at the far end and Hannibal and Margot closer, Alana nowhere in sight.

With staggering steps, he made his way to the table and Hannibal was swiftly on his feet, taking Will’s shoulders to help support him until his body was lowered into a chair. There was something so far away in Hannibal’s touches, though Will was certain it wasn’t from the man being closed off, but rather from the way his head continued to try to pull him into the pulsing darkness.

“How are you feeling, *brangus berniuk?*” Hannibal asked in a soft whisper, but even that was enough to cause Will’s head to bash the words unforgivingly against his skull. He groaned, hand pulling at his hair in a hope that pain would distract him from the other pain, though he wasn’t sure where the thought that that would help in any way exactly came from. “You should drink some more water, my love.”

Will wasn’t exactly sure where the glass came from, but it was frosty cold in his hand and was forced to his lips. His body worked against him and swallowed down the cold liquid when all Will wanted to do was throw the glass against the wall and let it shatter.

“Good,” Hannibal whispered, pressing a kiss to Will’s head.

It registered somewhere in his mind. Somewhere was a voice that said that Hannibal was simply taking care of him, but his body was screaming the opposite. It was telling him to run, to fight, to do something to this monster of a man. To end the both of them before they did something else they would come to regret.

Like getting married or running away together or having a son.

Will whimpered as the thought weighed heavily in his mind. This had all been a mistake. Loving Hannibal had always been a mistake and now he had only let the beast drag him further into the cave and he was just going to infect Walter with the same fate.

“I want you dead.” The words were hissed out through his clenched teeth and made his head rattle and echo like an empty cavern. The grip in his hair tightened as the jackhammer in his head worsened. Hannibal’s death wouldn’t solve anything, but it would absolutely make him feel better.

“In the morning.”

Will wasn’t sure if the words were real or if he had just imagined them in his inescapable pain, but Hannibal’s lips had moved, so maybe he really had said the words. Hannibal had promised this would be the last time. Hannibal had said that if Will waited until the morning that Hannibal wouldn’t fight him anymore. If they waited until morning then all of this could be over and the world would be better off for it. Alana and Margot and their son would be better off for it. Walter would be better off for it if the both of them were dead...

Tell me. How would you do it?

With my hands.

That’s what he would do. Use his hands. Maybe Hannibal would smirk in the same little way he had in his office so many years ago. Maybe Hannibal would die with that smirk while his lips turned blue and his skin went pale.

Maybe once they were buried in the ground there would be a breath of fresh air. Maybe the wars would stop and no one would be hungry. Maybe homelessness would be solved and illnesses would cease to exist. They were extensive and improbable maybes but with Hannibal’s butterfly flapping wings no longer able to cause tornadoes, then maybe those maybes were possible.

“Margot,” Will muttered out, turning his attention to the woman who was watching him with an expression he couldn’t quite place, had never been able to place on the woman. “I need you to do something for me.” Margot licked her lips and turned her body away from where it had been focused on the two children. Will watched as she traded a look with Hannibal who simply stayed silent while waiting for whatever Will was about to say. “Will you take care of Wally?”

“Take care of...?” Margot trailed off, looking back at the boys who were still happily playing, though Walter kept looking down the table at them momentarily.

“Not in present company, Will,” Hannibal scolded in a soft voice.

Margot seemed to understand well enough. She got to her feet and straightened her dress, calling the attention of the children at the end of the table. “Boys,” she said with a smile. “Will you two play somewhere else? The grownups need to talk.”

“Whatever they have to say, they can say in front of me,” Walter grumbled, though his voice was not lost to Will. He was bold and the cold stare at Hannibal told Will everything he needed to know and it only solidified his choice that much further.

“Wally, do as Margot asked,” Will instructed, only receiving a shocked look from Walter. “And then I want you to sleep in my room tonight.” Will could feel Hannibal’s disapproving gaze over him, but he ignored it. Those eyes could drill holes into him all they wanted, that didn’t change what was coming.

“Alright.” The word was hesitant and slow from Walter, but he obeyed, getting to his feet and picking up his deck of cards. “Can I take my food?”

“Of course dear,” Margot replied with a nod. “Just don’t let Alana know when she gets home. Make sure you wash the dishes when you’re done with them.”

Walter picked up his plate and nodded to Morgan who happily slid from his chair and followed after Walter. Walter’s steps paused when he reached their end of the table and he cast a glance over the three of them carefully as if picking apart the conversation they were bound to have before being tugged along by Morgan’s hand on his shirt.

When the door had closed, Will tried to sit up in his chair, a hand taking his head to try to hold it up as his thoughts swirled. The room stayed silent, both Hannibal and Margot once more taking their respective seats. Hannibal’s warm hand rested over Will’s clenched fist on the tabletop and Will swiftly pulled it free, eyes squeezed shut. He let out a deep breath and forced himself to meet Margot’s gaze.

“I need you to take care of Wally if something happens to us,” he finally stated. Margot’s brows furrowed, lips pursed, but she said nothing. Just the idea of saying words was enough to make Will’s head throb excitedly and cause his stomach to gurgle and churn with the water he had drunk. “I-Fuck!” he hissed, head falling forward once more. “Hannibal, please. Help.”

“Hush, my love,” Hannibal instructed, once more taking Will’s hand from the table and pulling it to himself. Will could feel his fingers slowly being unclenched with soft and gentle touches until Hannibal’s thumb pressed into his wrist. Will’s hand snatched around Hannibal’s wrist, the deep scarring that was there hard against his palm, reminding him of just another one of his failures. “Better?”

The clarity that came with a finally full deep breath sent Will to tears. He rested his head on the table, trying to catch his breath as the throbbing ebbed away and left only silence. A hand gently brushed up and down his back soothingly and Will nearly choked at the idea that even though Hannibal knew what was coming, even though Hannibal was more than well aware of what awaited him if he stayed, he was still being so kind to Will.

“You’re aware of Will’s condition, yes?” Hannibal asked across the table, but Will couldn’t bring himself to look up at the tense silence that followed from the woman. Instead he shuttered through his breathing and his free hand gripped the table cloth in his fist. “If he is not better by morning, I’ve agreed to a mutual... conclusion of our relationship.”

“Mutual conclusion,” Margot repeated and Will could feel those blue eyes staring into him. “The boy will be left alone then.”

“He will need someone to care for him,” Hannibal agreed.

“He has family on his mother’s side, doesn’t he?”

“No,” Will argued. “They won’t take care of him. They’ll put him in some sort of foster care the moment they’re able.”

“And his biological father?” Margot tried again.

“I don’t know who he is. Molly never said,” Will once more answered before sitting himself back up. He let out a deep breath and wiped the tears from his cheeks. “Margot, I trust you and Alana.”

“We have no legal claim over-”

"You've hidden him here just fine," Will pressed, meeting Margot's blank stare. "Jack could get you new identification, though I'm sure you have your own connections."

"You're just going to do that to Wally?" Margot demanded, voice tight as her gaze narrowed. "Give him hope and then rip it away from him?"

"He'll understand. He's a smart boy."

"Who's still grieving over his mother," Margot pointed out, getting to her feet and folding her arms over her chest. "Do not take another parent away from him."

"He'll be better off without us," Will said solidly. There was a small squeeze to Will's wrist and he glanced over at Hannibal.

"Perhaps Margot is-"

"Stop," Will ordered, shaking his thankfully clear head. "This is my decision and I expect to see it through to the end."

"I don't want any part of this," Margot muttered, snatching up her wine glass and finishing it off. "He is your son, Will. For once in your life, grow up and take care of something."

Will blinked and stared after Margot as the woman more or less stomped from the room. A silence filled the room and Will sighed before turning his attention to Hannibal. "I want us dead," he whispered. "That hasn't changed."

"I know," Hannibal assured with a small nod, though there was nothing in his voice to tell Will what he was feeling. Nothing about his person that he could pick up on, his person suit miraculously sewn back into place.

"I need us dead."

"I already promised, Will. There's no need to upset yourself over it."

Will growled at the words. "You're not fighting me."

"I never have."

"What the fuck is wrong with you?"

"My greatest mistake and most defining trait has and probably always will be my compassion for you and its inconvenience." Hannibal reached out with his free hand and found his wine, scenting it carefully before taking a sip of it as if this were any other normal night and his own death wasn't looming before him. "Take that as you will."

Will closed his eyes with a snort of laughter, a storm of emotions raging through him and he wanted to scream from not being able to find a specific one to focus on. Instead he tried to focus on his body and what he was feeling physically. That was far easier to categorize than his own head.

His migraine might have been locked behind a closed door but that didn't stop the way that his body ached all over it. Love bites seemed to radiate heat over every inch of his body. His thighs were sore from several positions he had been forced into hours previous. His biceps burned, his back ached and each movement hurt with the fullness that had been Hannibal.

Will groaned and opened his eyes to find a curious expression on Hannibal's face. Will pushed himself from his chair and to his feet, but he didn't dare remove his arm from Hannibal's soothing grip. Instead his other hand took the table so that he could lean over Hannibal. Hannibal met his gaze head on in silence, waiting for more to happen.

"I still love you," Will whispered, the feeling nearly drowning him as it flooded his chest.

"And I you, dear boy."

"I will always ache for you."

"And I will hunger daily for you."

Will sighed and closed his eyes, hand leaving the table to brush through Hannibal's silvering locks. "Wonder if the boys took bets on how long we'd stay married. They must know by now." Will gave a small laugh at the idea.

"Till death do us part."

Will nodded and leaned closer, placing a kiss to Hannibal's mouth. When Hannibal didn't fight him, he pressed in closer, knees finding purchase on either side of Hannibal's thighs on the chair. He didn't dare break the kiss or push it any further. It wasn't that kind of kiss. Those were lost to that morning. But this kiss left him just as breathless when he broke it.

"Take me to bed," Will instructed, resting his head on Hannibal's shoulder. "I believe you requested that I wait until morning."

"I would be rather grateful if you did."

"Are you going to try to convince me not to?"

"No, dear boy," Hannibal replied in a decided voice. Will sat up and gave Hannibal a confused look, eyes flickering between amber eyes. "I hope that everything that's around you will convince you. It will be far more persuasive than I could ever be."

"I want Walter to sleep beside me."

"I would never deny you your son, Will."

"I just want him to understand he's loved."

"He will," Hannibal assured softly. "Let's get you to bed. We'll come to a firm decision in the morning."

"Will you hate me for what I pick?"

"No," Hannibal answered with a shake of his head, fingers pushing through curls. "I could never hate you, cunning boy. But your son might."

Will frowned and shook his head. "I thought you weren't going to try to convince me otherwise."

"I'm not. I'm just asking that you consider what will happen to your son is all." Hannibal circled his free arm around Will's waist and shifted to the edge of the chair. "I'm going to release your wrist, alright?" he asked softly and Will gave a small nod, resting his head on Hannibal's shoulder. Hannibal let his hold on Will's pressure point go and there was an immediate moan of pain and Will hid his face deep in Hannibal's neck. Hannibal wrapped his free arm around Will as well and lifted Will up, holding Will tightly to him as he left the dining room to head back to their bedroom.

"You're always stronger than I think you are," Will muttered, breath hot against Hannibal's neck, arms and legs tight around Hannibal to help hold up his own weight. "I'll miss your strength."

He would. There was something breathtaking in the way that the man always seemed to have the motivation and the power to do everything he had done. Will could only compare it to something super human. A strength that had been focused and trained for years upon years, made from something deadly for something deadly, but now was being used gently to care for someone.

Will was lowered back into his bed, but he couldn't bring himself to release Hannibal when Hannibal tried to straighten himself back up. Hannibal's hands found the mattress for balance and Will's lips pressed to his, something needy in the kiss. Will tugged on Hannibal until Hannibal was over the top of Will, knees on either side of his hips and elbows beside Will's head in support.

"Are you feeling deprived tonight, Will?" Hannibal asked carefully between kisses.

"Just trying to remember," Will answered, not allowing Hannibal to pull away. His arms linked around Hannibal's neck to hold the killer there above him. "Remember everything. Every last horrible thing we've done to each other, every scar we've given to each other physically and emotionally. I just want to remember."

Will kissed Hannibal again and one of his hands slipped down Hannibal's shoulder and to his wrist, slipping under the cuff of his shirt so his index and middle fingers could trace the marks left in Hannibal's skin from Matthew Brown.

Hannibal's fingers pushed through Will's curls before they settled at Will's forehead, tracing his own markings made in Will's skin as they continued to kiss. Soft and slow. Nothing sensual was in any of their touches, it was just as Will had said. This was meant to be remembered. Etched into their skin like their scars.

A knock at the door broke up their shared touches and Will shook his head as Hannibal tried to pull from his grip. Hannibal gave Will a small smile in assurance before finally hauling himself from the boy and off the bed to the door. He pulled it open to find Morgan there instead of Walter like he had suspected.

"Hanni, Wally hurt himself. He said you could help," Morgan announced, though there was nothing hurried in the tone. He simply rocked on his feet, waiting for Hannibal to react.

"Where is he, Morgan?" Hannibal asked kindly.

"My room."

"Show me, Morgan," Hannibal instructed, motioning Morgan from the room. He glanced back at Will over his shoulder with a smile and Will nodded Hannibal's excuse from where he lay in bed. Hannibal closed the door behind him and followed Morgan through the hallways and finally to Morgan's room. Morgan opened the door and Hannibal stepped in to find Walter on the edge of the bed, his shirt wrapped around his hand that was bleeding enough to make the t-shirt a deep crimson color. “Walter,” Hannibal said, making his way over to the bed. The boy’s light eyes flickered up and then back down to his hand without a word. “Morgan, can you find me a first aid kit?”

“I think there’s one in the bathroom,” Morgan said, turning towards the door and skipping from the room.

Hannibal waited for a moment before turning back to Walter and making his way to the bed. He sat down beside Walter and the boy didn’t shift away from him, but didn’t make any acknowledgement of Hannibal’s person. Hannibal unbuttoned his sleeves and rolled them up before he held out his hand, palm up and waited. It took a moment for two more of silence before Walter slowly held out his hand and placed it in Hannibal’s.

Hannibal carefully removed the fabric around his hand to look over the decent sized slice in the side of his index finger that was still bleeding freely. Hannibal covered it up once more with the shirt and held it tightly in between his hands, causing Walter to gasp in pain and attempt to pull free unsuccessfully.

“What did you do, Walter?”

“It’s Wally, and I didn’t do anything,” Walter shot back, though his voice was soft and his eyes still avoided Hannibal’s gaze. “Morgan took the knife and I was trying to make sure he didn’t hurt himself and he got me.”

“Knife?” Hannibal asked back, glancing around the room for any hint of the weapon and coming up empty. Walter’s free hand reached under one of his legs and pulled out a decent sized folding hunting knife and passed it over to Hannibal who took it. “Where did you get this?”

“It’s my dad’s,” Walter explained, voice still quiet. Hannibal watched as Walter’s eyes went to the door when Morgan entered it, rushing to the bed with a white plastic kit.

“Here you go, Hanni,” Morgan said, setting the kit in Hannibal’s lap before jumping up onto the bed and bouncing. “I’m sorry I hurt you, Wally.”

“Morgan, can you do something else for me?” Hannibal asked sweetly, causing the boy to stop jumping on the bed. Walter’s face turned from one twisted with pain to something a little softer. “Can you go get Walter a glass of water, please?”

“Yeah,” Morgan answered quickly, jumping from the bed and stumbling to his knees before scrambling to his feet and racing from the room.

Hannibal set the kit aside and held up the knife for Walter to look over, brows raised in question. Walter rolled his eyes with a sigh. “*Tu vis dar ne mano tėvas,*” he grumbled. Hannibal didn’t dare answer the sentiment. He stayed silent, unmoving and waiting for the boy’s explanation and it didn’t take much longer before the boy gave an irritated sigh once more and spoke. “I heard you speaking in the dining room. When you kicked us out I wasn’t about to let my dad do something he would regret. I snuck into his things and stole it. I don’t know where his gun was, but with what Morgan did with the knife, it’s probably better I couldn’t find it.”

“You care a lot about Will,” Hannibal pointed out, finally letting Walter’s hand go to open up the kit beside him. He pulled out some alcohol wipes and opened one up before taking Walter’s hand once more in his.

“He’s the only one that my mom’s dated who’s cared enough to put time into me,” Walter muttered, hissing in a breath as the shirt was pulled from his hand. “Shit.”

“You would do well to refrain from such language around me, son,” Hannibal said sharply before he realized exactly what had come from his mouth. His movements paused and he stared at the crimson that was still flooding from Walter’s finger.

“I’m not your son,” Walter answered back just as hotly. “Just because you tried to save my mom doesn’t mean that you’re suddenly some good guy. And just because you married my dad doesn’t mean that you’re my dad or whatever. Sir is as close as I want to get to you.”

“God forbid that we become friendly.”

“I don’t find you that interesting.”

Those words of the past brought a small smile to his lips and he cleaned at Walter’s wound with the alcohol wipe. There was a whimper from the boy and he bit his lips between his teeth, but didn't say a word.

“You will,” Hannibal assured in the same way he had all those years ago to the boy’s father. Even if the child knew all of his crimes inside and out, and only the ones that had been reported and he had admitted to, there was so much more to Hannibal than Walter could possibly imagine. It would take time, but Hannibal was certain that, if given the chance, the two of them could become close, even if it wasn’t exactly what he was looking for. “I don’t think you need stitches, so that’s good.”

“It fucking burns!” Walter whined, eyes shutting tightly.

“I will be discussing your disobedience with your dad. I do not approve of such language, Walter.” Hannibal wiped down as much of Walter’s hand as he could before reaching out to the kit to find a piece of gauze. “I will not put up with it.”

“Won’t matter if you’re dead,” Walter grumbled, wincing as Hannibal pressed the gauze to his cut probably a bit harder than what was necessary and held it there while he located some medical tape. “Is that what’s going to happen? I’m going to wake up tomorrow and both of you will be dead and I’ll be shoved into the foster care system because my family doesn’t want me and I’ll be left here wondering what was so wrong with me that my parents didn’t want me. That everyone who was ever a parent to me left me with no safety net and that they didn’t care.”

Hannibal was quiet as he worked, slowly taping up the gauze around the cut. He cleaned the rest of Walter’s hand of blood and glanced at the door when it finally opened and Morgan stepped back inside with a cup of water. He brought it over to the bed and Walter took the glass.

“Thanks,” Walter muttered with a light smile. “And I know you didn’t mean to hurt me. I’m ok.”

“Can I see?” Morgan asked back curiously and Walter held out his bandaged finger for Morgan who tipped his head curiously. “You didn't have to sew it? It was bleeding a lot."

"It wasn't deep enough, but it might scar," Hannibal answered softly, handing out some medicine to Walter who looked at the pills suspiciously until Hannibal showed him the packaging that it had come from. Walter took the medicine and swallowed it down with the water. "Walter, your dad would like to see you."

"But I'm not done looking," Morgan said, reaching out and taking Walter's hand.

Walter winced. "You need to go to sleep."

"But you're leaving in the morning," Morgan argued with a pout, though his attention was quickly pulled back in the other direction. "Hanni, how long did it take you to become a doctor?"

"A little over a decade," Hannibal replied kindly.

Morgan looked up in confusion, though he didn't drop Walter's hand. "What's a decade?"

"Ten years," Walter supplied, gently pulling his hand from Morgan's to hold it to his bare chest in protection.

"That's a long time," Morgan muttered with a small sigh. "Is that how long it took for my mother to be a doctor too?"

"Yes." Hannibal gave Morgan a small smile. "Morgan, can you put this away for us?" Hannibal held out the closed first aid kit and Morgan snatched it up with a smile and a nod, hurrying from the room. Hannibal's gaze fell to the boy beside him and he let out a deep breath. "You're very perceptive, Walter."

"It's Wally, and my dad taught me what to look for to stay safe. Especially after that man attacked us."

"I see."

Walter inhaled deeply and got to his feet. "Thanks for helping me," he grumbled, though the words were sincere. "I suppose I better say goodbye to my dad, shouldn't I?"

"Walter," Hannibal said carefully. The boy didn't turn to face him, but didn't snap back the correction of his name. "If something does happen to your dad and me, you will be taken care of."

"Liar."

"My lawyer has my will. You will obtain my entire fortune, Walter. Everything will be left to you."

There was a stunned silence from the boy and Hannibal let it sit. There was nothing else that Hannibal could offer the boy for comfort for what was bound to be coming.

"I don't want your money, Sir. No offense, but no amount of money will replace what you've taken from me and what I am about to lose."

With that, Walter left the room and Hannibal gathered up the knife and shirt and followed the boy out of the door. He found Morgan in the hall who attempted to talk to Walter, but Walter simply ruffled the kid’s hair and kept walking, ignoring the boy any further. Hannibal frowned and stopped beside Morgan.

“Is Wally ok? He’s been sad since Will got sick,” Morgan muttered, watching after Walter’s retreating form with a concerned expression.

“He’s just worried about Will,” Hannibal explained in a soft voice. He lowered himself to his knees and took Morgan’s shoulder. “You need to go to bed now Morgan. We need some time alone as a family. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Morgan replied slowly, looking once more down the hall and to where Walter had disappeared around a corner. "Is he going to be ok?"

"You care a lot about Walter."

A bright smile came to Morgan's face and he nodded. "He's my best friend."

Hannibal returned the smile. "I'm glad you found a friend." Hannibal reached out a hand and he patted Morgan's shoulder kindly. "Go to bed Morgan."

Morgan gave a nod and obeyed, pulling from Hannibal's grip. "Good night Hanni."

"Good night Morgan."

Hannibal pulled himself from the floor and took in a deep breath, trying to ready himself for whatever the night held. He found his way back to Will's room and when he stepped inside he found Will fast asleep in the bed with Walter sitting on the other side of the bed, a book in his uninjured hand. Hannibal looked over Will a little closer and found Will's hand clutching tightly to Walter's injured hand. Walter's face was twisted into something painful, his jaw tight, but he didn't say a word. He didn't even so much as look up when Hannibal took a chair from the desk and pulled it up to the bedside to sit in it.

"What are you reading?" Hannibal asked softly.

"A book." The answer was dull and disagreeable. Hannibal crossed his legs and sat back in his chair with his hands folded in his lap. Walter's gaze flickered up for a moment before it turned back to his book. "Don't look at me like that."

"Like what?" Hannibal asked as innocently as he could, simply observing the boy for any reaction that came from him. Anything that would let Hannibal in closer, let him see exactly made this boy tick.

"Like you're trying to pick my brain apart," Walter answered coldly, though he didn't look up from the book. Instead he turned the page. "I've had enough from doctors after that man and Alana trying to claw into my mind. I don't need you doing it too."

"I am simply trying to get to know you, Walter."

There was an irritated groan and Walter closed his eyes. "Please stop calling me that. It's so stuck up. Wally or Walt is fine."

"I would prefer we use the name your mother gave you."

Hannibal could only watch as a small glare was shot at him before the attention was turned back to the book in the boy's hand. "Well, she never called me that unless I was in trouble."

"How often were you in trouble?"

"Far more just in the time I've spoken to you than I have been in my whole life up to this point."

“That’s a little extreme, isn’t it?” Hannibal asked, head tipping to the side as a small silence filled the room between them, only broken up by Will’s gentle snores. Hannibal watched as Walter’s eyes flickered over the page in his book and was curious if maybe the boy had blocked him out for whatever world he was exploring.

“Is it?” Walter finally answered with a breath as if the question had just registered for him. “I hadn’t noticed.”

“What are you reading?”

“Words that you are interrupting.” Walter gave a meaningless shrug and Hannibal nodded. The message was clear. Walter didn’t want a thing to do with him and that was fine. It wasn’t like the child meant much to him. He was simply making the effort for Will’s sake in case the man decided to let them live in the morning.

His promise would always stand. Walter would want for nothing. His will was clear in its instructions and even with Walter in hiding, the lawyer would make sure it was handled with the utmost care. Walter would receive the best schooling made possible and could spend whatever he wanted and would still live comfortably until the end of his days. All of Hannibal’s homes and assets would be given to Walter as well to do with what the child wanted. If he wanted to sell everything off, he could. If he was smart he would keep a hold of the real estate and let the values of them continue to rise. Of course, those decisions would be saved until the boy was old enough to accurately make them just as Hannibal’s money was kept from himself until he was twenty one.

There was a whimper from Will and Hannibal’s other foot lowered to the floor, but before he could do anything, Walter had the book set aside and his hand was brushing through Will’s curls. Walter shushed the man until Will settled back into sleep and Walter gave a hint of a smile before returning to his book, the thumb of his trapped hand caressing over the back of Will’s hand.

“Before you ask, I’ve seen my mother do that to calm him. He had nightmares all the time,” Walter mumbled out, turning the page of the book and settling back into the story that it held. “Sometimes they were violent. I remember him falling asleep on the couch during a baseball game and he threw the remote through the TV.”

“That must have been frightening,” Hannibal pushed in a quiet voice, noting the way that Margot had been right. Walter would open up if he was the person to speak first. Hannibal couldn’t push him. There was no chance in a million years that Hannibal could wring the information from the boy, but a little gentle coaxing would be enough.

Walter gave a small shrug and shook his head. “I’ve seen other men my mom’s dated hit her, punch walls and throw chairs through windows. Will didn’t do it to be mean. He was just scared.”

“And why don’t you like to be called Walter? It has more to it than the name just being stuffy.” Hannibal crossed his legs once more, hands again folded in his lap as he looked over the boy who was still reading. Walter frowned and Hannibal figured he had pushed too hard, but Walter surprised him by speaking.

“The men my mom dated would call me that before touching me.”

“Touching you?” Hannibal frowned at the words, hands going tight in the fabric of his slacks. “What do you mean, touching you?”

Walter frowned and his eyes unfocused from his book, blinking until he looked up. “You don’t have to ask, do you? You know how.”

“Did your mother know?” Hannibal asked back carefully, something tightening his jaw at the idea of what Walter could have possibly gone through and how, even if Walter didn’t accept him, if they lived past the morning, he wasn’t going to let anything of the sort happen to the boy again.

Walter snorted out a pained sort of laugh and nodded. “Yeah. She knew.” The words dripped sarcasm. “Why the hell would I tell her? She was always so much happier when she was dating until she wasn’t. I couldn’t break up her happiness.”

Hannibal gave a small nod and a deep exhale through his nose as pieces of why Will and Walter were so incredibly close came into focus. “And how often did you go hungry?”

“I...” Walter paused and wrinkled his freckled nose in dislike. “How did you know?”

“The way you eat tells me that you’re afraid you won’t get a next meal. You take far more than you could possibly finish just in case there isn’t more,” Hannibal supplied, thinking back over the way that Walter had piled his plate with food earlier.

“Alana said the same thing,” Walter whispered. He stared down at his book, though he had fully stopped reading now. “My mom went hungry far more than I did, but there were nights where I didn’t get food. Nights where we would have toast for dinner. Just bread and butter. Other nights we would share a packet of ramen. Rice was another thing we ate a lot of. I don’t know if I ever want to see rice again.”

“When did that change?”

“Will changed that.” Walter swallowed loudly and looked over at his dad who was still asleep, hands still clasped together. The look in Walter’s eyes was fond and loving. “He was so good to us. Even when he was distant and went back to work for Jack, he would check up on me. Text me every day until it just stopped. Until we thought he was dead.”

Hannibal was quiet for a moment, thinking over the moment that they had fallen over the cliff. They might as well have been dead. That was how they were supposed to be until Will dragged them both to the cliffy shore and saved the both of them until Hannibal had the strength to take them the rest of the way to safety.

He hadn’t thought about the effect it would have on the world outside of them and the FBI. It didn’t matter what the rest of the world thought or saw. All that mattered was making sure they were safe and alive. And he hadn’t truly cared about Will’s family, despite how much he tried to respect that Will was still married. But now that Walter was family, it shed a new light over what the boy had been going through.

Walter was left to wonder what had happened to Will. Will was injured or dead and it was all because Hannibal the Cannibal had finally caught up to the Special Agent. The last thing known about Will was him disappearing when the police escort was attacked. That seemed so long ago that their little plan had worked. It had always been the plan, ever since Will had come to ask for his help. Ever since Will had said please that had been their plan. It didn’t need to be spoken aloud. They both knew exactly what was going to play out and play out it did. It had always been fate's design that the two of them run away together. From that first meeting in Jack’s office, they were doomed to the outcome. And Walter Graham had been strung along in it, stuck right in the middle.

“And when you found out he was alive?”

Walter sighed and licked at his lips, turning them a bright and slick red. “I don’t really know how I felt. I remember my mom broke down in the living room. She was so relieved. I guess I was too. But he was different when he came home. He was still kind. He never did or said anything that was cross, but he was changed.”

“You blame me for that,” Hannibal pointed out, shifting in his chair a little before his attention went back to a quiet Walter whose mouth was twisted into something between anger and frustration.

“I blame you for a lot of things,” the boy finally settled on. He let out a sigh and turned his attention back to his book, eyes scanning over the page. “And you deserve each one of them.”

“Are you looking for retribution?”

Silence once more came from Walter as he read. He turned another page and bit on his lip before slowly and thoughtfully shaking his head. “Everything comes back around. You’ll get what’s coming for you eventually. Karma’s a bitch.”

Hannibal gave a small nod. “It might be, but that does not change the fact that I have asked you to stop using such language. It would be wise for you to clean up your vocabulary.” A dark glare was shot at Hannibal, something so sharp it could have sliced through diamond. “A boy with your level of intelligence should be able to come up with something far more creative and clever to say.”

“I’m sure I could,” Walter responded without missing a beat. “But it wouldn’t piss you off quite like swearing does, would it?” Hannibal shook his head in reply and Walter nodded. “Then I will continue to swear as I fucking see fit.”

“It wouldn’t upset me,” Hannibal agreed. “But it would be far more impressive.”

“You’re one of those people who think that swearing makes a person smaller, less intelligent. I would argue to think that swearing just shows a better understanding of vocabulary and an extensive knowledge of knowing exactly when and how to use such words to obtain the greatest effect when they are said.” Walter shrugged and once more turned the page to his book. “And if I wake up fatherless tomorrow, I need to upset you as much as is possible tonight. I might not have another chance.”

“It is rather impressive that you’re able to read and hold a conversation with me,” Hannibal said, calling Walter’s eyes to him at the change in subject, but those golden eyes once more fell to the pages where the boy was probably safer than in the bedroom with two killers. “Are you able to retain what you’re reading?”

“It’s a children’s book. It’s not difficult to read and talk to you,” Walter shot back.

“What book is it?”

Walter closed his eyes with an exasperated breath out. “It’s The Great Gatsby. Fuck. Do you really need to know?”

“Morgan was reading that. Did you take it from him?”

“He wouldn’t shut up about it so I said I’d read it to get him to leave me alone.”

“You didn’t have to read it,” Hannibal pointed out, a small smile tugging at the corner of his lips at how kind the boy was to Morgan. How much Walter tried to come off as something stronger than what he was. Walter would go down swinging in the end. He had been fighting his whole life and Hannibal didn’t see that fight burning out any time soon. It was kept alight with secrets and pain and the want to be more than those things. “And that is not a children’s book. That book is meant to be read by someone in their last year of high school and if I recall your age, you have barely reached middle school.”

Walter didn’t answer, didn’t acknowledge the information that Hannibal provided to him. He simply continued on in the book until Will made another sound of distress in his sleep. Hannibal didn’t react this time. He let the boy help Will, watching the care Walter took with the man. There was a real trust there. A real love that had developed between them. Someplace safe that had been created to house Walter away from the world that had been so cruel to him. A world that had shoved him into situations that not even adults had to face.

“What do you think of Daisy?”

That seemed to catch Walter’s attention a bit more. He inhaled sharply as if being woken from a dream and met Hannibal’s gaze. “The author is heavy handed in trying to make her appear pure. She’s associated with white. White clothing, white roses, white cars.” Walter’s face had changed to something of dislike while he continued to pet his father’s curls. “But she’s shallow and is in love with the money. Nothing else.”

“Interesting. And how far are you in the story?”

“Daisy and Gatsby danced. I remember being surprised by his graceful, conservative fox-trot—I had never seen him dance before,” Walter quoted without looking back at the book that had been set aside so he could attend to Will who was once more sleeping peacefully.

“Your memory is impressive.”

“It needs to be if I want to pass school. That’s all school is, isn’t it? Just regurgitating information they shove down your throat?”

Hannibal gave a nod in answer, interest pulling at him at the way that Walter didn’t accept any compliments. They were all turned to something practical. Excused and frittered away as if they held no value to him whatsoever. Was he always like this or was it simply because it was Hannibal who had offered the compliments?

“Walter, your dad and I will need to have a private conversation in the morning before we depart.”

“Interesting choice of words, Sir,” Walter grumbled.

“How so?” Hannibal asked back, though he knew exactly what he had meant with those specific words.

“You were telling the truth when you said earlier today that you weren’t going to lie to me.” Walter sighed and pulled his hand back from Will’s hair. “You didn’t correct me when I said that you two were going to die. Are you two going to die tomorrow?”

“I cannot give you an answer to that, Walter,” Hannibal replied carefully.

The child was no fool. Will had taught him well, so well that if Hannibal didn't know any better he would assume that Walter was his biological child. They were so incredibly close in personality it was off putting. Did Walter do it to keep Will close or was this really how Walter was as a person?

"I swear that if you touch my dad with any intent to hurt him, I will kill you myself."

Hannibal blinked at the words in interest, unable to stop the amused smile over his lips. "And tell me, Walter. How do you plan to do that?"

"With my hands."

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brangus berniuk: dear boy

Tu vis dar nesi mano tėvas: You are still not my father

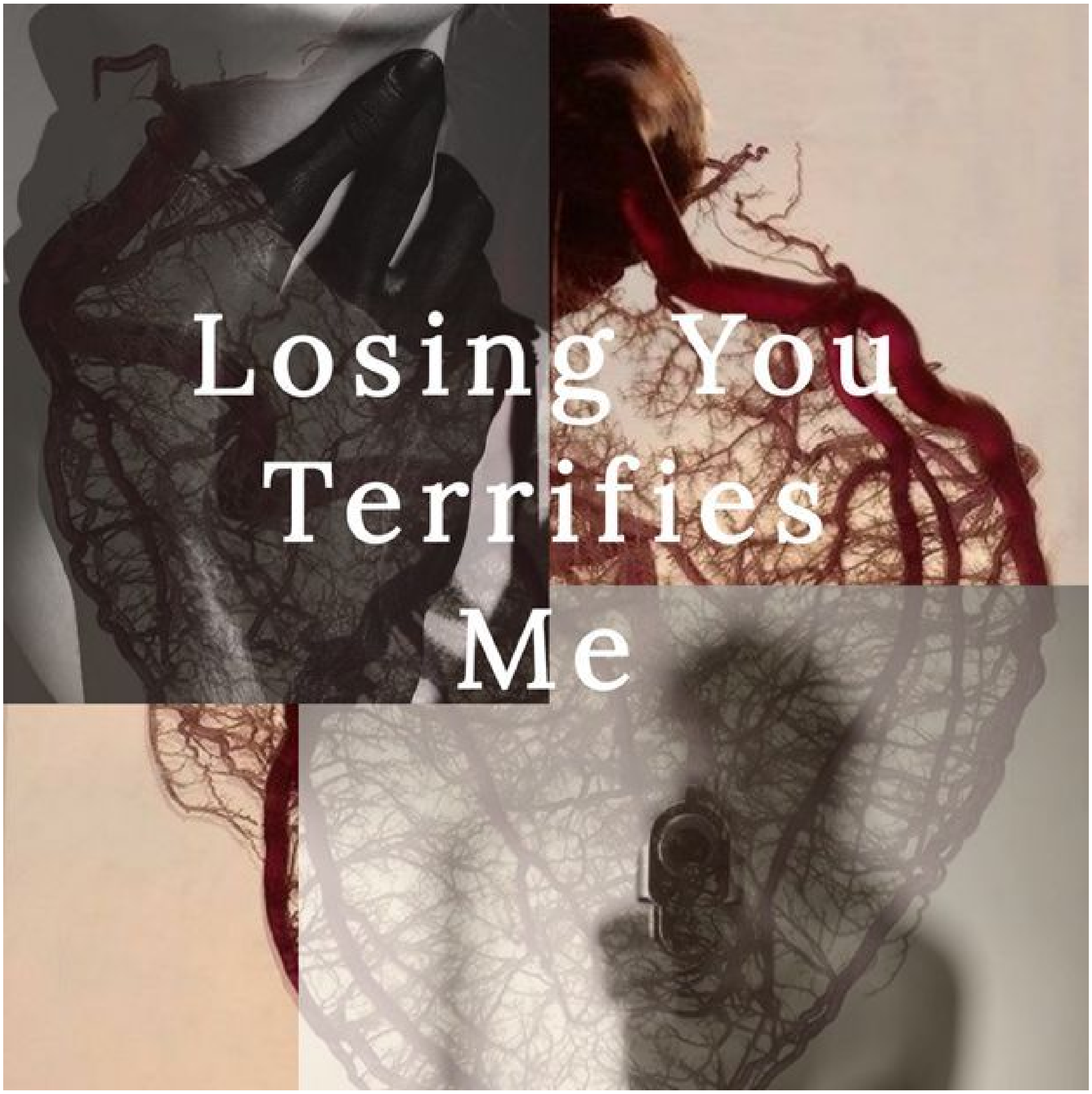
Chapter 39

Chapter Summary

> Some mysteries are better left unsolved, Hannibal.
>
> You’re a cunning boy, aren’t you, mylimas?
>
> I hope I’m still precious after all of this.
>
> Infinitely so.

Chapter Notes

> Hello everyone. Surprise update! I thought it would be a nice birthday gift from me to you guys to give a surprise chapter. You will still get the normal update on Thursday, this is just a bonus. Had a good birthday, but also got sick. So in bed with a fever and a cough, but that is besides the point.
> Thank you all so much for your birthday wishes on FB if you sent them. They really meant the world to me. Much love! Hope you enjoy this chapter. Please don't hate me too much. And I will see you for Thursday's update!



Hannibal woke to the sound of the bed shifting and he opened his eyes to see Walter pull from the bed and quietly leave the room. Will was still asleep, tangled in the sheets, one arm draped across the expanse of the bed, having been holding Walter through the night and Hannibal hoped it was enough. If not for their sake, then for the boy's.

Hannibal sat up in the chair he had occupied for the entirety of the night, back in pain from the odd angle and the discomfort of the wood frame. He stretched, spine cracking with his movements and he sighed, rubbing at his tired eyes. Will must have sensed that he was awake, Will often could, because he spoke in a soft tone still laced with sleep.

"Come here."

Hannibal closed his eyes for a moment before his body obeyed, pushing himself up onto legs that were weak from little blood flow. He straightened himself up a bit more before he moved to the side of the bed, sitting on it. Will hadn't moved, still on his stomach, back rising and falling steadily with a calm breath. Hannibal reached out his hand and let his fingers caress through Will's curls, unsure if this would be the last time he would have the chance to do so.

The last time the concept of death had frightened him had been years before. Not with a stab wound and a fever. Not in a bathroom or at a lighthouse. Not on a cliff side or on a pig farm. Not with a gun pointed at his head or with a noose around his neck and wrists slit. The last time that death had frightened him had been when his sister had gone missing and the overwhelming thought that he was next nearly suffocated him.

He could feel that same suffocation now. Somehow the room was growing thin in its air supply and his blood was beginning to run with more CO2 than he could process. It wasn't until Will's hand was cupping his cheek that he realized he was hyperventilating.

Those blue eyes held concern, but there was still an underlying determination in them. His mind was made up and Hannibal's promise held strong. He didn't need to be told this was it. He didn't need anything to say those words to him, he never had.

Will didn't say anything either. He didn't need to. His kiss said enough. A kiss that told Hannibal that everything would be ok, that he could finally rest because Will would take care of it, take care of him. Will would end this unholy battle they had spent the better part of the last five years fighting and that was calming in a sense.

Hannibal was guided gently back into the bed and Will climbed over the top of him, the kiss unbroken and he doubted it would be broken until his lungs stopped working. His fingers dug through Will's curls until Will's hands had finished unbuttoning his shirt to open it up. Will's hands circled around his wrists and his hands were pulled from Will's hair. Cinnamon hinted curls that he would so dearly miss.

Will's fingers were gentle as they traced over the deeply scarred flesh of an attempted proxy kill that had only pissed Hannibal off before Will brought him Randell Tier, spread out like a feast on his dining table. He had only fallen further for Will when he came home to that picture.

Fingers then pushed one of his hands over his head, the other still being caressed. Will's fingers were feather light up and over his left palm until fingers met the silver band that sat proudly on his finger and somehow that night felt so long ago, so distant in this moment.

Your thoughts are so loud, husband, Will's mind called into the space between them. Hannibal could hear the words as clear as day, ringing like crystal. *You don't have to worry any longer. Your mind can relax now. I won't be long after you, my monster. I promise I'll follow.*

His left hand was pressed above his head, crossed at the wrist with his right, Will's grip firm on them, but not threatening. Will's free hand dropped back to Hannibal's chest and his palm pressed tightly over his heart. Hannibal could feel it beat up into Will's hand as if begging to finally be held and stopped.

The weight shift was nearly unnoticeable, carefully calculated to be as hidden and unobtrusive as was possible. Will was fully settled over him now, weight pressed into Hannibal's wrists as Hannibal was ceaselessly kissed.

I love you, Hannibal.

And Will did. Hannibal could feel it being poured from the man in an overwhelming emotional waterfall. Something torturously pleasurable. Sinful and wicked. So deep and real it was consuming.

Hannibal's fingers flexed in the grip above him, but he wasn't attempting to get away, all he wanted to do was cling to the boy above him. The boy who was going to be his beginning and his end, his devil and his angel, his slayer and savior all in one and it was dizzying.

Will gently bore down on Hannibal's wrists, adding more weight into them, slowly restricting the circulation in them. Hannibal's eyes flickered open, and he was met with the beautifully flushed face of his husband whose focus was solely on him. Gorgeous in his brutality.

Hannibal would remember him like this. Hold this image of Will kissing him wholeheartedly deep inside of his subconscious until he couldn't hold to it anymore. It would be the last thing he would remember and he found himself fully accepting that fact. He let his eyes slip closed again and fell into the kisses still being pressed into his lips.

Like a caress, Hannibal felt Will's hand slide up his chest until Will's warm palm was over the front of his throat, fingers and thumb gently petting his skin before settling there, precisely over the two points of his arteries. Hannibal's breath caught before Will even had a chance to compress and cut off the oxygen supply to his brain, palm resting over his trachea and larynx that would be so easy to crush.

Shhh, my monster, Will's words whispered through him from lips still pressed firmly against his own. *This is my design. Love it as you love all of me.*

Hannibal let those words soothe him, wrap him in a burning heat, something so intimate in allowing Will this moment. Yet, questions ran through his mind. A million questions and he desperately needed the answers before the end did come. He had to know and maybe it truly didn't matter, but for some reason, it meant the world to Hannibal that he would be permitted into Will's thought process once more.

When I'm gone, what are you going to do, my love? He let the words seep into the universe and just as he had thought they would be, his beloved snatched them up and answered back.

I will lay beside you, hand in hand and put the barrel of my gun in my mouth. The sound will give Margot and Alana enough time to settle the boys so they won't be the ones to find us.

And where is your gun, Will? Where did you hide it?

Walter had said that he couldn't find it when he had been looking for Will's hunting knife. Will must have known that someone would look for it, maybe thought that Hannibal would look for it in a chance to save both their lives, breaking his own promise.

Some mysteries are better left unsolved, Hannibal.

You're a cunning boy, aren't you, mylimas?

I hope I'm still precious after all of this.

Infinitely so.

Will settled his full body weight over Hannibal and his grip tightened with purpose, both hands on wrists and throat and a soft choking noise caught in Hannibal's throat. He could still breathe, though it was more difficult now. Only his ability to speak would be gone, something frighteningly tender in how Will restrained himself from crushing Hannibal's windpipes all in one go.

Will wouldn't do that. He would draw this out, make this last. Their last few moments together were going to be the longest that Hannibal had ever lived through and he found himself welcoming the idea, slowly falling into it.

Hannibal tugged naturally at his wrists in Will's unrelenting grip. His mind might have been accepting, but his body would be anything but. His mind knew it was too little too late, but his body arched, trying to remove Will from over the top of him. His throat muscles twitched against Will's fingers as he tried to swallow in vain and more choking noises came between kisses from Will.

He could feel the heat rising to his cheeks as he gasped in the sparse air that was still granted to him. There was pain in the pressure now and he could feel his own heart beating against Will's palm and hear it in his ears.

Focus on me, Hannibal. Don't focus on the hurt.

He had never wanted to bow to Will's instructions so completely before, but even as he tried to lean himself into the kind and gentle kisses his husband gave him, the burning in his chest was overwhelming and set fire to a pounding in his head that made him think of getting his head smashed in with a crowbar.

Will applied a more precise force to Hannibal's neck with his thumb and fingers, cutting off Hannibal's air completely. Hannibal willed his body to still, to obey him as it always had, but his eyes flickered open with a renewed panic that prickled through his body.

His pulse ticked up a few beats faster, desperately trying to provide oxygen that he could no longer suck in. His body jerked a bit more violently than before, teeth clenched and legs trying to obtain leverage, but his feet only slipped in the sheets on the bed. It was futile. No sounds aside from his strained choking noises slipped past his lips when Will broke the kiss momentarily for a new angle before kisses were pressed back against him.

Every muscle in his body tensed and he was certain that if he could breathe, he would smell his own fear thick in the room. The idea was surprisingly gratifying and he was curious what his own fear would smell like. Would it be acidic like Will's or metallic like Margot's? Sickly sweet like Alana's or hot and bitter like Walter's? Maybe muted and citrusy like Morgan's?

Hannibal desperately tried to hold on, keep a careful mind on his husband's touches, but it was difficult when his medical mind was running a mile a minute, calculating just how much more time he had left before the inevitable. He knew what he must look like. His eyes would be wide open and bloodshot now, his lips off red, slowly becoming ashen as they twitched uselessly between noises and failing gasps for air.

His body was losing its tension, adams apple shifting less, struggles to breathe coming in fewer spurts as resignation set in.

Will's hand had tightened significantly and Hannibal's vision was going fuzzy, eyes half closed and not far from rolling back. His eyelids fluttered and the heat was finally leaving his cheeks, leaving him grey.

Hannibal could feel the phantomness of surprise at his own awareness when Will released his wrists, Will's fingers sinking into his hair. And finally his body obeyed him, finally relaxed instead of fought. His movements were sluggish as he weakly placed his hands to either side of Will's face, caressing softly, struggling to keep them there as a peacefulness incased his mind.

I love you, Hannibal.

Hannibal's fingers twitched and then dropped down to the wrist around his throat, though he didn't push or pull, just let his fingers relax into Will's steady and calm pulse as whiteness enclosed his vision.

Will could still let go. There was still time. There was another minute before full unconsciousness and at least another minute or two before his brain functions would fail and death would finally claim him. Hannibal was curious if Will would let his own compassion inconvenience him as Hannibal's had done so often before, but it was swiftly answered when Will's other hand added a new pressure to the first.

Cunning boy, was Hannibal's final thought before everything went delightfully blank.

He wasn't sure if shock was the right word. Shock was definitely present in his system, but not at what he was seeing. More in what his body was doing.

In his hands was clutched a heavy and thick book, one that he had stolen from Morgan earlier at breakfast when Alana asked him to remove the book from the breakfast table and Walter assumed that maybe fate had made Morgan read this particularly heavy book on this particular day. A day where he would, without any real reason as to why, use said book to protect a serial killer.

The spine chilling choking sounds had finally come to a stop from the man under Will and time crept by like years as Walter stepped closer to the bed, the book raised over his head. Seasons of playing baseball would finally mean something more than just trying to fit in with a crowd of kids that didn't like him.

He swung the book at the back of Will's head as hard as he could, the jolt through his arms at the contact was unreal and frightening. There was a groan from Will and he fell forward, over the top of the doctor.

Walter blinked, the book dropping from his hands with a thunderous thud as it hit the floor and he stumbled back with wide eyes and uneven breathing as Hannibal gasped, coughing and sputtering.

Walter fell into the chair that was beside the bed, hands trembling as he watched Hannibal weakly push Will's dead weight from over the top of him and onto the bed beside him. Walter glanced over Hannibal, taking in the man's bruising neck and slowly recoloring cheeks. The man's fingers shook as he checked over his throat, continuing to cough and gasp.

Walter could hear the clock on the wall ticking down the time, echoing through his skull, but it felt distorted like a truck stop in the middle of the night, like he wasn't supposed to be there. Or maybe it was his heart beating in his ears. Whatever it was, it was loud and hollow.

Walter tipped his head as the older man got himself under control before sitting up to check over Will. His pulse was taken and then fingers slid to the back of Will's head to take in the damage.

"He-" Hannibal cleared his throat, the word sounding as if he had been swallowing gravel. There was a hiss of pain and another throat clearing. "He'll be alright."

Walter nodded numbly, hands no longer trembling. He wasn't sure if the assessment was a relief or not. He wasn't truly sure what to make of his dad any longer. The same man that had taken him fishing and played catch with him and the dogs in the yard was not the same man who lay unconscious now.

You never really knew me, Molly. We both know exactly what our relationship was and we were too stubborn to say anything about it. I was a stand in for Walter's father and you were a stand in for Hannibal. We never really loved each other, we were just two broken people who tried to use each other to fix ourselves.

Maybe Will had been right. Maybe Walter never truly knew his dad. Maybe their relation was nothing more than a façade, a stand in for what might have been. But Walter didn't believe that. He didn't want to think that were the case. He really did feel like Will was a dad for him and maybe that's why he still felt so numb after watching a cruelness that he hadn't known was there, manifest itself in his dad.

"Leave," Walter said, voice far stronger than he thought it would be. He wasn't sure where the word came from, but it held firm and Hannibal gave a curious look. He shook his head and Walter could feel a frown cover his face. "Leave now, Hannibal."

"Walter-"

"Now."

Walter stood from his chair and stared down Hannibal who had finally begun breathing steadily again. The bruising was beginning to darken under the angry red from Will's tight grip and there were tear tracks down the man's cheeks.

Walter inhaled deeply and folded his arms over his chest, waiting.

Hannibal was the common denominator here. Hannibal was what had torn his world in half before Walter even knew it was. Hannibal, while he didn't physically do it, aided in his mother's death. He ripped apart a marriage that could have truly been something great. He twisted his dad's mind until Will was this monster. Hannibal was at the center. He was the root of all of their problems, so it only stood to reason that if Walter could separate the man from both Will and him, then their problems would stop. It wouldn't be perfect and it wouldn't be an overnight fix, but things would get better. Walter would see to it.

Hannibal rose shakily to his feet with another cough and rebuttoned his shirt with unsteady fingers. The bruising was covered up, but still lightly peaked out from under Hannibal's collar. He cleared his throat once more, fixing his hair before heading for the door.

He stopped and Walter bit his tongue as the man turned back to look over the boy beside the bed and the unconscious man in the bed. His eyes looked over the mess that was there, that he was leaving. He exhaled deeply and his fingers were once more at his throat.

"I said leave," Walter hissed. He knew he didn't have a chance if Hannibal decided to do something to him. There was no way he could fight off a man that much taller and strong than him, but he would fucking try. His eyes glanced back over Will who was still pale and sick looking, but something under the mattress caught his eye. Just barely a disturbance in the edge of it. When he looked back up, Hannibal hadn't moved an inch, eyes tight on him. "I mean it."

"Walter, your dad-"

"I will take care of him," Walter interrupted sharply. Maybe with Hannibal gone Will could be better. Maybe Will could be the way he was when they were a happy family. Before the man that came after them. "I've always been there for him and it won't change now."

"Your loyalty is admirable."

"Get out, Hannibal."

But Hannibal didn't listen. When would the man ever listen? The man was the devil himself and would do just as he pleased. Walter moved as quickly as he could and reached under the mattress to find the cold harshness of the gun he hadn't been able to find the night before. He pulled it free and with both hands to hold it steady, aimed it in Hannibal's direction. There was something amused that settled into those red eyes that made Walter change the weight on his feet.

"Do you know how to use one of those?" Hannibal asked back in a cool voice, or as cool as his aching throat would allow.

Walter hoped his actions would speak for themselves, but his hands were trembling so badly he was sure that he looked weak and helpless. He used one of his hands to jankily pull the slide back and his hands shook with the effort before it finally clicked and was quickly aimed back at Hannibal, finger on the trigger.

"My dad taught me."

Hannibal's amusement didn't wane, but he gave an accepting nod. "I can see that."

"Leave Hannibal. Stay away from us."

"And if I-"

There was a crack as the gun went off in Walter's grip and he jumped with the force of it in his hand. His ears rang with the noise and there was a sharp and pulsing pain in his hand that had been cut the night before. When he opened his eyes again, there was a hole in the wall beside Hannibal's head. Walter blinked several times and it took a moment for him to find himself and aim the gun again, the grip less firm as his finger cried in anger.

"I won't miss next time," he hissed out.

"That was quite impressive, Walter," Hannibal acknowledged, voice still ragged. "There's just a matter that I need to settle with you before I depart and I would appreciate it if we conducted ourselves like civilized adults."

Walter's eyes narrowed and his nose scrunched up. "What?" he asked back in a low voice. He didn't have time for this. Margot or Alana would be coming to see what the sound was that crackled through the house.

“What happens to me when I leave here, Walter? What awaits me? What stories are going to come from your lips?”

Walter was silent for a moment. He could tell someone, anyone what he was going through, but no one would believe him. And that would only be if he could get away and find someone not in Hannibal’s back pocket. Alana and Margot were trapped there along with Will and the FBI might as well have been his personal bitch with how much they aided him. There was truly nothing he could do that wouldn’t label him as insane and land him in a hospital to be looked over by doctors for the rest of his days.

He could go after Hannibal though. If he truly felt the need. He was certain he could do it. Granted, he would need to wait a few more years until he could make his own money and he needed to train to be better with weapons than he currently was, but that was definitely a direction he could take.

“I'm not going to find you,” Walter answered finally after a moment. “I'm not going to look for you. I don't want to know where you are or what you do. I don't want to think about you anymore.”

Something flickered across those maroon eyes that Walter couldn’t exactly place. Nothing else was said. Nothing else needed to be said. It was enough for the both of them. Hannibal simply gave Walter a small nod and finally left the room, closing the door behind him.

Walter stayed rigid in his stance, unable to loosen until the door opened and Alana rushed in. She paused as she took in the scene before stepping over to Walter. She dropped to her knees beside the boy, but he didn’t pay her any mind.

“Wally, give me the gun,” she commanded gently in a whisper. Walter couldn’t bring himself to move, couldn’t unhinge his joints or loosen his muscles. The gun was worked from his hands and upon its rescue, he tumbled to the floor, releasing a deep breath he didn’t know he had been holding. “Are you alright?”

“Is my dad?” Walter asked, uncertain why his concern over his father was still so strong. Unsure why a monster draped in a black plumage like a raven with antlers that scraped the ceiling and spread out like growing tree branches was now laying so utterly human like in this bed without a mark on him.

“I’m sure he’s fine,” Alana muttered, blue eyes flicking carefully over the boy on the floor. “I’m more concerned over you.”

“Where’s Morgan?” Walter pushed himself to his feet in a blind rush, an urge to hide away. Alana’s hands reached out to him, but he pulled from them before they could catch him and he ran. Ran as fast as he could from the bedroom and back towards the dining room where the boy had last been. He pushed open the double doors and came face to face with a concerned looking Margot and a happily distracted looking Morgan who had a new book in his lap and a slice of buttered toast in his hand. “Morgan, let’s go look at the horses,” he gasped out, unsure if he could breathe correctly.

The boy looked up from his book with a smile, both toast and book hastily set aside. He lowered himself from the tall chair with a bit of Margot’s help and raced over to Walter’s side. “Ok,” he said excitedly. “Can we take Applesauce?”

“Yeah, sure,” Walter answered absently with a nod. “Go get Applesauce.”

“Ok!”

Morgan tried to race from the room, but Margot’s hand caught his shoulder and she lowered herself to her knees, her other hand taking Walter’s. Her own pair of blue eyes leveled over him for a moment and he licked his lips just wishing to be let go, no longer wanting to be trapped like a fish in a net.

“Where is Hannibal, Wally?” she asked softly.

“Gone,” Walter said with a firm nod. He glanced over at Morgan who had his head tipped in confusion.

“You didn’t-”

“No,” Walter quickly answered before the rest of the question could be put out in the open. “I didn’t do anything.”

Margot nodded softly, eyes flickering up to the door behind Walter and Walter glanced over his shoulder to find Alana in the doorway with her hands on her hips where they naturally seemed to like to rest.

“Go see the horses, boys,” Margot instructed and Walter nodded with relief. “Go on.”

Margot watched as Walter snatched up Morgan’s hand and tugged him from the room at a pace that had the younger boy stumbling to keep up. Once they were gone, she rose back to her feet and sighed, looking up at her wife who was silent, face lost in thought as it so often was.

“Where is he?” Margot asked, folding her arms over her chest and making her way over to Alana. Alana’s lips pursed and she shook her head with a small shrug. “You don’t know?”

“The car is gone,” Alana replied with a deep breath, something weak in her normally strong stance. “I hope he doesn’t come back.”

“They left Walter?”

Alana shook her head. “Will’s in the bedroom. From what I gathered, one of them hit him with Morgan’s book. He’s alright. He’ll wake up in a bit.”

“And the gunshot?” Margot didn’t miss the small tip upwards in Alana’s red lips that quickly thinned out again.

“Walter shot the gun. Must have been aiming at Hannibal.” There was a hint of mirth in her eyes. Margot nodded, but Alana’s expression did nothing so soften the worry that was sitting in her gut like a rock. “What do we do with them?”

Margot closed her eyes and rubbed at them with her thumb and forefinger for a moment. “I haven’t a clue. Everything that we’ve been working with Jack on doesn’t matter anymore. The whole point was for them to be able to leave us alone, but with them split up, who knows what they’re going to plan to do.”

“You believe Will would do something-”

“Of course I do,” Margot whispered exasperatedly, shocked that Alana would even consider Will as some innocent bystander in all of this. “You know exactly what he did before we took care of Mason. You know what he was planning when you all faked Hannibal’s escape. You can’t tell me you honestly thought Will would go through with the plan, can you?”

Alana shook her head. “I was hopeful, I still am hopeful. He is a good man.”

“He was a good man,” Margot corrected. “He’s just as twisted as Hannibal now. You don’t know what it’s like to have him in your head like we did. He just led you on with fluffy romance nonsense while Will and I had death beat into us. It was all I could eat, sleep and breathe until Mason was finally gone. I can’t begin to imagine what Will’s had shoved down his throat.”

Alana gave a sympathetic look and her hands took Margot’s arms, caressing them softly. “We’ll make plans to leave,” she said with a kind smile. “New identities, new lives, new country. As soon as we can get Will and-”

“Just Will,” Margot interrupted. Alana’s eyes widened in confusion and she fell silent. “Will is leaving and we’re going to take care of Walter.”

“Margot, we can’t just-”

“Yes we can,” Margot insisted.

“Will would hunt us down to get his son back. We can’t risk that. Not when Hannibal already has a death wish for us,” Alana hissed. “There is no way we are taking Walter with us. The whole point is to protect our son, Margot! Our son is who will suffer if we bring Walter with us.” Alana leaned her head forward and sighed. “I don’t care if we died right now, but nothing is going to touch Morgan. Taking Walter with us would get us all-”

“Will wouldn’t touch Morgan,” Margot defended. “He’s fucked up, but he would never hurt a child. I should know.”

Alana glanced up, lips slightly parted at the pull of a memory. Of Margot explaining why she had an unsightly scar across her stomach. Explaining how she had Will’s baby in her until Mason ripped it away. How, despite how upset Will was, he had offered to be there for the child. Had offered any sort of help that Margot could need. Margot was right, but that did nothing to comfort Alana. Not when it came to their child.

“If Will won’t hurt Morgan, then why are we taking Walter with us?” Alana challenged, uneasiness in her bones. Her eyes flickered behind Margot and out the back porch window where the two boys were with the dog chasing after them.

“You want Walter to grow up with a father like Will?” Margot sighed. “You don’t think that Will would have some effect on the kid? He already just accepted Hannibal into his life without question. What child does that?”

Alana licked her lips. “Why is sending him away with Will now any different from sending him away with the two of them yesterday?”

Margot fell silent and pulled from Alana’s grip, turning away from Alana and leaving Alana standing confused. Margot’s heels clicked on the floor as she made her way over to the porch window. A small smile pulled at her lips as he looked over the two boys and the dog in the yard, the horses probably forgotten.

Alana followed after her, and sighed when she watched the children playing. She didn’t like Walter much, if she were being honest with herself. She wasn’t sure what Margot or Morgan saw in the kid. He was cold, dark, cruel. He was unkind to her son who trailed after him like a sunflower does the sun. He was sharp and blatant with Margot who smiled at him like he were her own child. He was inhumanly savage towards her. It would be a struggle to take him with them. He would resent them, fight them. He had behaved thus far due to Will’s explicit instruction but without Will there, there would be no restraint of the boy. He was devoted to Will to a fault.

“At dinner last night,” Margot finally said, calling Alana’s attention from the boys outside and to her. “Hannibal said that they had come to a mutual conclusion of their relationship and he mentioned Will’s condition. I’m assuming Will remembered. You said that he becomes violent when he remembers.”

“Yes.” Alana nodded. “The journal said that Will would attack Hannibal if he remembered.”

“Will kept saying that he wanted the two of them dead and they asked us to look after Walter if something happened to the two of them.”

Alana was silent as she let the information set in. She nodded. As much as she didn’t like the child, his fate was not one she could leave up to Will or Hannibal. They had to step in and protect the child. Alana sighed.

“I’ll make some calls,” she announced, causing Margot to turn around to fully meet her gaze. “We’ll leave as soon as time permits. Make sure both the boys are ready to go in short notice.”

“I’ll miss it here.”

Alana sighed with a small nod. “We’ll have each other and that’s all that matters.”

Chapter 40

Chapter Summary

> There were a lot of items missing in his head, but something about this folded piece of paper in his hand told him that if he could only figure out the meaning behind the heart that he would unlock everything. That this was a direction to go, a North to follow and if he could just figure out which way the compass was pointing then he was home free.

Losing
You Terrifies
Me

Hannibal felt like the emptiness had finally reached his chest. The very last time he ever felt like this was when he was eight years old. The day he learned that he would never see his sister again. It became easier when he realized that although she was dead, she would always be with him.

In the same way that Will would always be with Hannibal, even if they were apart. Would feel Hannibal. Will knew him intimately enough. They were one and had been for so long that Hannibal was certain that, even if Will didn't remember him, Will would still know the exact moment when Hannibal died.

I will follow you. Will had promised and Will kept his promises. The idea was slightly terrifying in a way. How had Hannibal tied them up so tightly together even after everything he had done? After every horrid thing they had done or said to one another? It was exhausting.

And Hannibal was simply just that. Tired. So incredibly worn down, the markings around his neck only being one such indicator. Will had been his stability, his rest and recharge and now with Will out of the picture, and Hannibal was determined to keep him out of the picture, he had the overwhelming need to return to his beginning. To restart where everything had started, whatever that restart was.

Mano mergina, aš noriu grįžti namo. (Little one, I want to go home)

This trip home would be the last. It would be the last time he would have enough strength to face that place again. One last time to see his sister and apologize for everything he had done before finally joining them. It was only fair. Only right. Poetic in every sense of the word. Fitting that he should end right where the rest of them had.

He couldn't leave just yet though. He couldn't abandon Will in such a way. Not his precious Will, a swirling pitfall of light and dark that were forever battling for control. Will deserved a better goodbye than a book to the head. Deserved some explanation as to why he had left, Walter only being one piece of the puzzle.

One last game. One last chase. One last display for Will. One of blood, guts and glory. A final masterpiece made to absolute perfection. It wouldn't be his *magnum opus*, but he would make it as beautiful as he could for his *magnum opus* to find.

Days ticked by as he watched and waited. Waited for just what he needed. Two people. The last two. Both to be cast in Michelangelo's fresco secco.

Perfection, often strived for, but not often achieved would be Hannibal's greatest challenge. This would be perfection. Absolute and utter perfection if such a form were able to be reached by men. And a man was what Hannibal was. Nothing less and nothing more even if he liked to live like a god among them.

Winter was starting to give way to spring, but on the coast, the ocean kept his art room ideally cool, allowing him to work as he needed for endless hours. A week passed by and then another, mind and body a slave to his creation.

With it finally finished and left to be either forgotten or immortalized, Hannibal made his way back down the coast and to where Will now occupied with his son.

An estate from slaughtering and packaging pigs. A house ran by two women and their own little boy. A home that Hannibal watched religiously, trying to find anything he could as a last hint of his husband's welfare.

Will stayed in bed most days, looking just as exhausted as Hannibal felt. Walter stayed by his side like a puppy and Morgan just as dutifully by Walter.

It was early morning by the time the lights had finally given way to darkness in that house and Hannibal snuck in through a window to find himself in Will's room.

The man was alone, Walter never allowed to stay with him at night, though Hannibal didn't have a clear answer as to why Will had been allowed to stay for that matter. But neither of those mattered.

Will's face was angelic, innocent and carefree. His curls were a tangled mess and he snored lightly as he slept.

Hannibal looked over the younger man for a minute, attempting to memorize this moment, sear it into his mind palace so he could live in it later. His eyes stopped flickering over Will and focused and his left hand where the wedding band still sat, much to Hannibal's surprise. Will couldn't possibly remember, could he? Surely not. If Will remembered, he would have come after Hannibal. He had promised he would.

With a deep breath, Hannibal reached over and carefully slid the ring from Will's finger, Will not even so much as stirring. It would be better this way. Will didn't have to think about him anymore after all of this finally ended. It... Was better.

Hannibal let his fingers brush the curls from Will's face and the man inhaled deeply, slowly pulling from sleep. He whimpered and turned with a creased brow.

"Monster," he whispered and Hannibal did his best to keep his chest from aching.

"Shhh," Hannibal hushed, a small smile pulling at his lips. "*Grįžk miegoti, mielas berniuk*." (Go back to sleep, dear boy)

Will gave another whimper and his eyes flickered open, looking like deep ocean waves in the dark. "I see you every night, monster," he whispered, tiredly. "You have only ever stared, never touched." His eyes fluttered shut once more, sleep holding rightfully to him. "Please touch."

There was an innocence to the request and Hannibal found himself obeying. His fingers brushed over Will's cheek, gratefulness flooding him at the chance of this one last conversation with Will.

Will sighed at the touch, leaning into it. "You feel so real, monster."

"*Esu tikra*." (I am real.)

"Your tone is gentler than you look. I wish I knew what you were saying." Will's eyes opened again, looking over Hannibal carefully before letting his eyes close. "I won't see you again, will I, monster?"

"*Ne, mielasis berniuk*." (No, darling boy.)

"Before you disappear, please do something for me."

"*Viskas*." Hannibal let his fingers once more run through Will's curls. (Anything)

"Kiss me, monster."

Hannibal stared down at Will, hand frozen. His heart stuttered in his chest as it always did for Will. Only ever for Will.

Would Will remember this in the morning? Hannibal doubted it. If Will had any recollection, it would most likely be blamed as a dream just as Will's words belonged to whatever dream he was having.

Hannibal's thumb traced the scar over Will's forehead and he leaned over, pressing a kiss to it. Will sighed lightly, a tired hand taking the back of Hannibal's neck and slowly guiding Hannibal down lower. Hannibal followed the gentle pull, peppering Will's skin with kisses until he finally reached Will's lips.

The kiss was soft and light. Something sweet to say goodbye without having to let the word slip between them. The word couldn't be said between them because then it would be real and Hannibal wasn't sure he could undertake such a challenge.

Will woke to sunlight filling the room. His eyes blinked to take in the brightness, seeming to take a bit longer to adjust than they normally did. He found himself once more in one of Margot and Alana's spare rooms, though the real reason he was there, he couldn't quite place and not even Walter would give him a straight answer.

His eyes flickered around the room before he stopped on a curious little item on his night stand. He sat up and reached out, picking up a little origami anatomically correct heart. His brows furrowed with the most dizzying concoction of *deja vu* swirling through his mind.

He pushed himself from his bed and got dressed from his exceptionally limited wardrobe. He couldn't find it in himself to let the heart leave his grip for more than a moment. There was something so familiar about the item that he just couldn't seem to quite place. He had seen it before. He was certain of it. Knew it from somewhere. Somewhere far away. Somewhere foreign.

He wandered into the dining room, nearly trampled by a passing dog and the young Verger heir who Walter seemed to hang around a decent amount. Though Walter wasn't with the child this morning. Walter instead was at the breakfast table when Will entered the dining room.

"Morning," Margot answered in her normally airy voice, blue eyes cold as they flickered up from her drink and to Will. Will gave a small nod in greeting and rubbed a hand over Walter's head, a smile erupting over the boy's face at the contact.

"Morning," Will replied softly, sitting down in his normal spot at the table. He looked up as eyes burned into him and was met with Alana's gaze resting on his closed fist. Will looked down over his knuckles and slowly opened them to show Alana what was closed beneath his fingers. Will glanced back up to catch Alana's expression, a hint of recognition in her eyes, something like understanding. "Wally, go play with Morgan," Will whispered, closing his hand once more and shooting his son a small smile. "I need to speak to Alana and Margot alone."

"Ok." Walter pushed himself from the table. "But you promised to spend the day with me."

Will gave a light smile, something wonderful at the idea of his son wanting to be with him. For some reason he had thought the boy wasn't close to him, thought the lowest of him and had been pleasantly surprised to find the case to be the opposite. Though he still couldn't get a straight answer out of anyone as to what had happened to Molly other than that she had passed away.

That had come as a sharp shock to Will and he wished he had some recollection of the event, Walter having said that he was present, but Will couldn't seem to locate the memory anywhere in his head.

There were a lot of items missing in his head, but something about this folded piece of paper in his hand told him that if he could only figure out the meaning behind the heart that he would unlock everything. That this was a direction to go, a North to follow and if he could just figure out which way the compass was pointing then he was home free.

"Of course," Will assured. "All day, just us two."

“Cool.” Walter left the room without another word, leaving the room silent.

Will inhaled deeply and let the origami fall from his palm and onto the tabletop, eyes tight on it and not daring to look up at Alana or Margot. “Please tell me what this means. I know you know,” he muttered out, hands becoming fists in his lap. “I’ve been quiet and been living with the small amount of information that you’ve given me, but I need to know what this means. Please.”

Will's eyes closed tightly and he licked his lips as he waited in silence. He knew what the rule had been to stay here. He had been told that the police and FBI were looking for him and that this was where he was safest, but the only way he could stay was if he didn’t ask questions, didn’t search out where all of his missing life and time had gone. He had been told that it was safer and he trusted Alana. He always had. She always did what she thought was right and if this was the only option he had to keep his son and stay safe, then he would take it, even if he didn’t know why he was hiding.

He opened his eyes and glanced over his fists in the continual stretching silence. His left hand caught his interest, an odd feeling over his ring finger. His ring was missing. He hadn’t noticed it when he had just woken, but something tugged at his heart and a panic set in. He had no clue why it was so important. It wasn’t the ring that Molly had given him. That had somehow ended up with Walter, on a chain around his neck. He didn’t question it though.

He unclenched his left hand and looked over the empty space where the silver and white ring had been and his mind scrambled for where it had gone. He remembered it being there yesterday. He took it off for his shower and put it right back on when he went to bed. Had it fallen off in his sleep? Gotten lost in the bed somewhere? He hoped that was the case. There was something so important about that ring, even if he didn’t have an answer for it.

“If I answer this for you Will, you can’t stay here anymore,” was Alana’s answer into the still room.

Will gave a small nod and a deep inhale. That had been Alana’s answer to everything. He had silently accepted it, gone along with it for the sake of his son. He bit his tongue in careful thought, body aching for this answer far more than any of his other questions had ever resonated in him. He needed this answer like he needed air to breathe, but he couldn’t do that to Walter. He wasn’t sure what Walter had been through, but it obviously was enough of something that Margot and Alana kept him nearly held in protective captivity away from Will.

“Do either of you know where my ring went?” he asked instead, the other words in his mind burning across his tongue and begging for release, but he bit them back. “I don’t know where it is.”

“We will keep an eye out for it,” Margot said kindly, sweetly. She had always been so soft, so gentle. Will wasn’t sure how he knew that, he barely knew the woman’s name, but he knew she was a good person. Knew she had been through hell and back and Will was just another hell she was battling. He would stay as far out of her way as he could. “Don’t worry. I’m sure it will turn up.”

“Thank you.” Will inhaled deeply once more and looked up at the little heart on the table, head tilting to the side. He reached out and picked it back up, pulling it closer to him and hiding it in his lap. He didn’t miss the way that Alana and Margot traded glances with each other, something nervous between them.

“What are you and Walter going to do today, Will?” Alana questioned, the change in subject more than painfully obvious.

Will shrugged. “If you have a wine cork and a bike pump you’re not using, I have an idea or two.”

Alana’s brows rose and Will was a bit surprised to see a smile pull at her painted red lips. “Of course. I’m sure we have those laying around somewhere.”

Will returned the smile, but his mind was fully stuck on the paper heart in his hand. A key to a room full of answers that he was denied and a burning in his bones.

“How much water do we need to put in it?” Walter asked as he picked up the pitcher of water that they had brought out from the house. It was still too cold for the water to have been turned back on, but the sun had enough warmth that it kept the chill at bay.

“How much water do you think needs to be put in it?” Will asked back with a smile, watching Walter slowly put together their water bottle rocket. He had taped fins to the bottle that were haphazardly shaped and would most likely make the bottle fly at an angle instead of straight up, but the boy was smiling and that’s all that mattered.

“Well,” Walter muttered, turning the water bottle around in his hand as he looked over it. “The air is what creates the pressure and the water is the thrust. So.... equal amounts make sense. Too little or too much of one won’t let it fly right.”

Will grinned and rubbed at Walter’s head. “Well, let’s see if that’s right.”

Walter nodded and began filling the bottle with the water, head tipped to the side as he carefully checked how full the bottle was getting. Will nearly laughed at how serious the boy was taking it, as if he were running calculations in his head to make sure everything was perfect.

“How are we going to get the rocket to stand upright on the bike pump?” Walter asked, his tongue quickly being bitten between his teeth as he went about trying to fit the wine cork into the bottle to seal it off.

“I don’t know. How are we going to?” Will asked back again, enjoying watching the boy think.

“There’s some bricks by the house. We can make a launch pad with that!” Walter placed the finished bottle aside and jumped from his knees to his feet. “Be right back.” Will stepped back to let the boy go around the side of the house and disappear.

Will gave a small laugh and turned towards the other side of the house where a pair of blue eyes had been watching them the entire time they had been outside. The little boy quickly hid behind the side of the house at having been spotted and Will only chuckled a bit more.

“Morgan, you can come over here if you want to,” Will offered out kindly.

Morgan’s small voice answered as he slowly leaned out from around the house. “He was so excited about being with you. I don’t want to-want to- erupt.”

Will knelt down with a smile and a shake of his head, a hand out to the boy. “You’re not interrupting. Come here.”

Morgan glanced over his shoulder and back towards the house where Will knew one of Morgan’s mothers was most likely watching him from the large windows around the estate, but he very slowly obeyed Will and stepped through the frosty, dead grass and to where the bottle rocket was.

“How did you know how to make that?” Morgan questioned, pointing to the water bottle as he stopped beside it.

“I was taught how in school,” Will said, looking over Morgan carefully.

Morgan’s blue eyes widened in curiosity. “I don’t get to learn fun stuff like this.” His voice held betrayal. “I have to learn stupid things like German. Where did you go to school?” Morgan’s arms folded over his chest with a huff.

“I went to school in a little town called Farmerville in Louisiana,” Will explained kindly. “Our school was so small that we held classes in trailers.”

“And you just had fun all the time?”

Will shook his head. “No. Not all the time, but sometimes.”

Morgan’s arms fell back to his sides with a small nod. “I guess I get to do some fun things too, but not make things like this.” He lowered himself to his knees to better look over the modified water bottle, but looked as if he didn’t dare touch it. As if he would upset some cosmic being if he so much as ever had the idea to reach out a single finger. “My mom lets me ride the horses.”

“That’s nice of her.”

“She’s been taking Wally out more than me though.” Morgan got back to his feet and looked out over the grounds. “It’s not very fair, is it? She’s my mom. Not his.” Morgan sighed. “But he doesn’t have a mom, so I can’t be mad.”

“It’s kind of you to let him spend time with your moms.” Will gave the boy a kind smile when he turned back to face Will. “It’s important for a growing boy to have a mom in his life. Mother’s teach things that a father can’t sometimes.”

“He doesn’t like my other mom much. I don’t know why.”

“Alana?” Will asked curiously and Morgan nodded in answer. “I think he doesn’t like how strict she is.”

“Strict?”

“She has rules that she expects to be followed and gets upset if they aren’t.”

“Oh,” Morgan muttered with a small nod. “Yes. She doesn’t like disobeying.”

Will inhaled deeply. “Wally grew up in a house where there weren’t very many rules and so he has a hard time listening to them. I’m sure he likes Alana just fine.”

“Do you like my mom?”

Will fell silent at that, mind digging through what little memories he had of the woman. Yes. He liked her. He liked her very much. She was a kind woman, a righteous woman, a woman who had the largest heart that Will had ever seen. She only ever wanted what was the absolute best for everyone around her. She seemed a bit colder now, more distant and bitter towards the world, but under it all, Will was certain she was still the same caring woman. She wouldn't have let him and Walter stay if she wasn't.

"Yes Morgan. I like your mom very much," Will finally answered. "We've been friends for a very long time. She and I used to work together."

"You did?" Morgan's lips tipped into a brilliant smile. "Are you a doctor too?"

Will shook his head with a chuckle. "No. I was a teacher for a school that your mother worked at."

Morgan blinked several times, looking confused. "Was she a teacher too?"

"She would help teach sometimes, but she was always a doctor."

"Oh." Morgan nodded. He jumped slightly as Walter came back around the building, struggling to hold onto four red bricks in his arms. Morgan took a step back and behind Will as if he were trying to hide once more, but Will reached out a hand and stopped him. "No, I-"

"Wally," Will said, pulling Morgan a little closer. "Is it ok if Morgan joins us? He wanted to see the rocket fly."

Walter stopped, his face turning down just slightly as he dropped the bricks onto the grass with a clatter. He sighed and fell down to his knees. "Yeah, whatever," he muttered under his breath as he began stacking the bricks. "He's got to help though."

"I'm sure he could go pick up the rocket when it lands, can't you Morgan?" Will asked kindly.

"Yes!" Morgan replied with a small and happy jump.

Walter rolled his eyes, but Will didn't miss the small smile tugging at the corner of Walter's lips.

The rocket was a success, both the boys enjoying it immensely, much to Will's surprise. He thought that the two would have gotten tired after the third time shooting it off, but both were more than happy to keep going.

"I'll refill the pitcher. Be right back," Walter said, grabbing the yellow colored plastic and racing back towards the house.

"Can you go grab the bottle Morgan?" Will asked and Morgan obeyed immediately without question, racing off to fetch the plastic that had gone a fair distance away.

Will inhaled deeply of the chilled air, letting it fill his lungs, something happy in his blood, though there was still something that was missing deep down. Something he couldn't exactly name, but he supposed it didn't matter as long as his son was happy.

Morgan came back and let the bottle fall back beside the bricks that Walter had set up to hold the bottle in and sat down beside Will, pulling his knees into his chest. "What happened to your ring?" Morgan questioned after a moment, reaching out to take Will's hand that was missing the piece of metal from it.

"I don't know. Lost it, I guess," Will said, something sad sinking into his voice, though he wasn't exactly sure why.

“Hanni wouldn’t like that,” Morgan stated strongly, causing Will to freeze, the name tugging at something in his mind. Something familiar.

“Hanni?” Will asked back, the word sweet on his tongue.

“Yeah. He gave you the ring.” Morgan tipped his head to the side. “You don’t remember again, do you?”

“Again?”

“Yeah,” Morgan said with a small nod, letting Will’s hand go. “You forgot before. He was sad about it, but he said that you remembered and then you got married and Wally was-”

“We what?” The air was sucked from Will’s lungs and a hand went to his head as his mind searched for a wedding that he had never attended. And to a man, no less. Was Will gay? No. But not that that mattered much. Why did it matter if he was or wasn’t. He obviously had loved this person enough to legally bind himself to whoever it was, and that’s what mattered. But how could he forget? Morgan wouldn’t lie about something like that. Children were known for spitting out the brutal truth all of the time. Why would the kid lie? How could Will forget his own husband? “I’m married,” he whispered.

“Yeah,” Morgan said brightly. “Wally doesn’t like him much, but I like him.”

Walter came back from the house, the pitcher sloshing some water out onto the grass in his hurry. Will glanced up at him and the boy stopped in his tracks, something knowing on his face. Walter nodded and moved closer, setting the pitcher on the ground before sitting on Will’s other side.

“You weren’t supposed to tell him, Morgan,” Walter said with a sad sort of smile on his lips. Will’s brows furrowed as he looked between the two boys, somehow much further confused than he had been.

“But his ring-”

“He wasn’t supposed to know, Morgan,” Walter said once more, cutting off the young boy with a nervous little laugh. “Go. Find him.”

“What?” Will asked softly, unsure exactly where this conversation was going. There were still so many variables and unanswered questions that Will wasn’t even sure where he was supposed to begin. He was drowning in new knowledge that did nothing to unlock how it was something he should have already known. He was married, great. To someone named Hanni, what an odd name. Why the hell couldn’t he remember? What was he meant to do with that information? “Find him?”

“He left,” Walter explained with a shrug as if it were the simplest explanation in the world. “You forgot and I made him leave. I thought we would be better off without him, but you’re miserable. You don’t realize it, but you are.” Walter smiled and turned to look at Will’s shocked face, something so calm and understanding about the boy’s features. “Go and find him.”

“Hanni?” Will asked back.

Walter snorted and shook his head. “Hannibal Lecter.”

Will's brows furrowed, the name pulling blurry images to the forefront of his mind. The silhouette of a man in a suit. He closed his eyes, trying to cling to that image, but as soon as it was there, it was gone again, leaving only smoke in its place. A shadow suspended on dust.

"You want me to go find some random man?" Will asked back, shaking his head and slowly opening his eyes again. "If I do that, we can't stay here."

"You know his name now, thanks to Morgan," Walter pointed out.

"Hey," the young boy grumbled, arms folding over his chest with a huff of air.

"That's the whole reason we were allowed to stay," Walter continued on softly. "He's not a good man, dad, but he's good to you. Makes you happy."

"Not a good man," Will repeated, a hand running through his curls. "When you say not a good-"

"I think you need to figure it out for yourself," Walter interrupted. "I don't think I'm the person who can tell you what he's done."

Will gripped a bit tighter to his curls and looked up at the clear sky, something finally starting to make sense despite the fact that it was leaving him with far more questions than answers. A husband who was a bad man, but good to him. But bad in the sense of a child's world being bad. Walter was only eleven. There wasn't much that Walter could see as horrible yet, was there?

"I'm not leaving you," Will stated firmly, shaking his head. "That's-"

"They won't let me go with you," Walter snickered, leaning into Will to knock Will slightly off balance. "You'll come back for me just like you always have. It's ok."

"But Wally," Morgan whispered. "You said that-"

"I know what I've said," Walter interrupted, reaching across Will and ruffling at Morgan's hair. "This is what I'm saying now. Dad, you moping around here day in and day out with nothing to do is driving us all a bit crazy. Go find Hannibal and then come back for me. We can go see the Great Wall of China or something after." Walter shrugged.

"You're..." Will trailed off, body suddenly wanting to be in two places at once. Here beside his son and off with this person he couldn't quite find in his own head, but had to exist somewhere.

"Would you get out of here?" Walter teased, though there was a pained sharpness to his voice. "Morgan and I will pick up and go in for lunch."

"A sandwich sounds good," Morgan agreed, causing Will to chuckle.

"Let's get this cleaned up," he said instead. "Come on boys. We'll go make sandwiches after."

* * *

"Goodnight," Will muttered, pressing a kiss to Walter's head. He closed the book they had been reading and set it aside on the bedside table, getting to his feet.

"Dad?" Walter asked, causing Will to turn back to the bed.

"Yes, Wally?"

“Are you going to leave now?”

Will inhaled deeply and glanced around the room, taking it in for a moment. “I haven’t decided yet,” he replied slowly.

“Liar,” Walter teased, reaching out for the book that Will had set aside to flip open to where they had been reading. Will gave a curious look and Walter shrugged. “You’re not going to finish reading it to me. You won’t be here in the morning.”

“How-”

“Will Lecter,” Walter said, catching Will off guard with the words. “Get your fucking ass out of this house and don’t you fucking dare come back until old shitty stick up his ass is back here.” Will blinked several times at the words before slowly giving a nod. “Good. Goodnight Dad.”

Will felt heavy as he left the room and closed the door behind himself. He stood there in the hall, a million thoughts running through his head until he reached a hand into his pocket and pulled the origami heart from it. He looked over it carefully for a moment or two before something written on the paper caught his attention.

With quick hands, he unfolded the creation until the paper was a crumpled mess in his hand with a swirling scrolling across it.

The Watching Star

Will’s eyes widened and his breath caught in his throat. A lighthouse. A lighthouse on a cliff with chipping paint that spiraled up it. Drawings on a table in an apartment overlooking New York City.

“Fuck,” Will whispered, a hand going to his head at the splitting head ache that erupted behind one of his eyes. He closed his fist around the paper and raced up the hall to where he knew Alana and Margot would be putting Morgan to bed. He knocked on the door and pushed it open, calling three pairs of blue eyes to land on him. “I need to talk to you,” he said in answer.

Alana’s brows rose and she gave a small nod, getting to her feet from where she sat on her son’s bed. “Be back in a minute, sweetie,” she whispered, leaning over to kiss Morgan’s cheek before following Will out of the room. Alana closed the door with a steadying and deep breath, folding her arms over her chest and turning to face Will. “What is it?”

“Where was I near a lighthouse?” he asked hurriedly. “I-I can remember a lighthouse. Where?”

“A lighthouse?” Alana asked in confusion. “I’m not understanding Will.”

“The heart. I unfolded it and it said this.” He held out the crumpled paper to Alana for her to see, his hands trembling as he did so. “I don’t know how I know, but it’s a lighthouse. That’s what this means. What lighthouse?”

“Will, calm down. Let’s talk this through, alright?” Alana reached out a hand and took his arm firmly, guiding him away from the boy’s bedroom and towards her study. She led Will inside and Will watched as she moved over to her desk, pulling open one of the drawers and fishing from it a black notebook. “Come sit down, Will. We have some things to talk about.”

“You told me today that if I-”

“Sit down,” Alana interrupted, looking up with a tight smile before she returned her gaze to the book, flipping through the pages.

Will was slow to obey, his body not feeling like his own. It felt distant and heavy when he stepped closer to the desk and eventually took a seat in a chair beside it. The room stayed in its silence as Alana continued to look through the book, finger trailing down the pages before she would flip to another one.

“What is-”

“Just a moment,” she interrupted Will, not looking up from her work.

Will nodded and licked his lips, looking at the mess of paper in his hand and the handwriting on it that was so damn familiar, but he still just could not place. It must have belonged to Hannibal. That was the only thing he could make of it. But then that meant that Hannibal had been in his room? When had another man been in his room? Surely he would have remembered. He didn’t sleep well. He was woken up by the wind outside his window. No one could have gotten in and out of his room without him knowing.

Will glanced up as the study door opened and in stepped Margot, straightening out her wonderfully expensive shirt as she made her way to the desk. She took one look at the book in Alana’s hands and understanding covered her features in much the same way that it had Walter’s earlier that day.

Why was everyone else allowed to know but him? What had he done that was so wrong that he wasn’t allowed to remember? What had he done? He wasn’t a bad person. He was dark, had his own demons to fight, but so did everyone. He couldn’t-

He’s not a good man, dad.

Maybe it wasn’t Will. Maybe it was the man he had married. Maybe that was what he wasn’t meant to remember. Maybe this Hannibal Lecter was the cause of everything, though what everything was, Will couldn’t be positive.

“Will, if you want to know this, I can’t allow you to-”

“I need to know,” Will said before Alana could finish her sentence. He shocked himself with the words, but there was something missing, some part of him so close to being in reach and he had to get to it. He just had to. “I can’t live like this anymore Alana. It’s torture to not remember anything.”

“I’d consider it a blessing,” Margot said in her bored and monotone voice, but she quickly placed a small smile on her face, eyes sparkling slightly. “But I think you liked your captor a bit more than I liked mine.”

“Captor?” Will ran a hand through his curls and glanced between the two women. He shook his head with a small groan. “If you tell me, I can’t stay here.”

“Correct,” Alana said with a nod, tone not unkind, but steadfast in its decision.

“And what about Walter?” Will asked, a hand taking the edge of the desk to ground himself from his body that was feeling like it was trying to float away, be anywhere but in that study.

“That depends on what you decide to do,” Alana explained. “If I tell you this and you are going to try to just stay under police radar, he can leave with you. If you decide to go after the person that I’m going to tell you about, Walter stays here with us. I am not about to let the sweet little boy anywhere near that man.”

“You mean Hannibal, right?”

There was a strained silence and Margot and Alana traded glances.

“Where did you hear that name?” Margot asked softly, a hand taking Alana’s shoulder.

“The-the boys mentioned it today. My husband, right?” Will gave a forced laugh and lifted up his hand that was missing his ring, his finger still feeling so odd without the band across it. “Neither of you took my ring, did you?”

“No,” Alana replied quickly. “We would never, Will.”

Will nodded. He inhaled deeply and closed his eyes. “You’ll keep Walter away from me if I go after my husband.”

“Yes,” Alana said.

“If you go after Hannibal, we will have no choice but to leave, Will,” Margot explained, voice a bit softer now, trying to convince him not to leave. “Hannibal will come after my son, and I cannot risk anything happening to him. You understand, don’t you?”

“He’ll come after your son? Who the hell did I marry?” Will gave another laugh, something bordering on hysterics and he lowered his head into his hands. His body was hot and tight as if his skin wasn’t his own. Something wasn’t fitting right. There was a piece out of place. “Or better yet, don’t tell me. Wally said it was better if I figured it out on my own. Maybe he’s right.”

Alana inhaled deeply, acceptance in the sound. “The lighthouse was in Maine in Cape Elizabeth.”

“Cape Elizabeth,” Will repeated, but the name was unfamiliar to him. Of course he knew of the town, but not to the point where he had lived there and called it home. But he must have if he knew this lighthouse. “I need to go there. At least see that and then I’ll-I’ll-”

“Go after Hannibal,” Margot interrupted with another one of her nearly nonexistent smiles. “You won’t be able to stay away, Will. He’s good at what he does.”

Will looked up from his hands in confusion, but didn’t dare push it. Instead, his attention was pulled to Alana who closed the book and held it across the desk. “This was with your things,” she explained. “Your amnesia isn’t anything new Will. For a time Hannibal was taking care of you and made notes about your time together. That’s what’s in this notebook.”

Will snatched up the book from her hand and looked over the leather binding, but even this, something that held a piece of his life in it, didn’t send a single spark of recognition through him. He opened it and came across the same scrolling as what had been on the origami heart. The handwriting of his husband, Hannibal Lecter.

Something in him couldn’t bring himself to read any of the words though. He closed the notebook and stared at the leather once more, deep in thought, weighing all of his options, feeling sick with either side of the coin he chose to flip to.

“I have to go to Cape Elizabeth,” he announced. “I just have to.” He got to his feet and strode past the two women and towards the study door.

“Will, do not expect your son to be here when you get back,” Alana called after him, causing Will to stop. “I will not allow you to take him into the world that you’re about to let yourself be sucked back up into.”

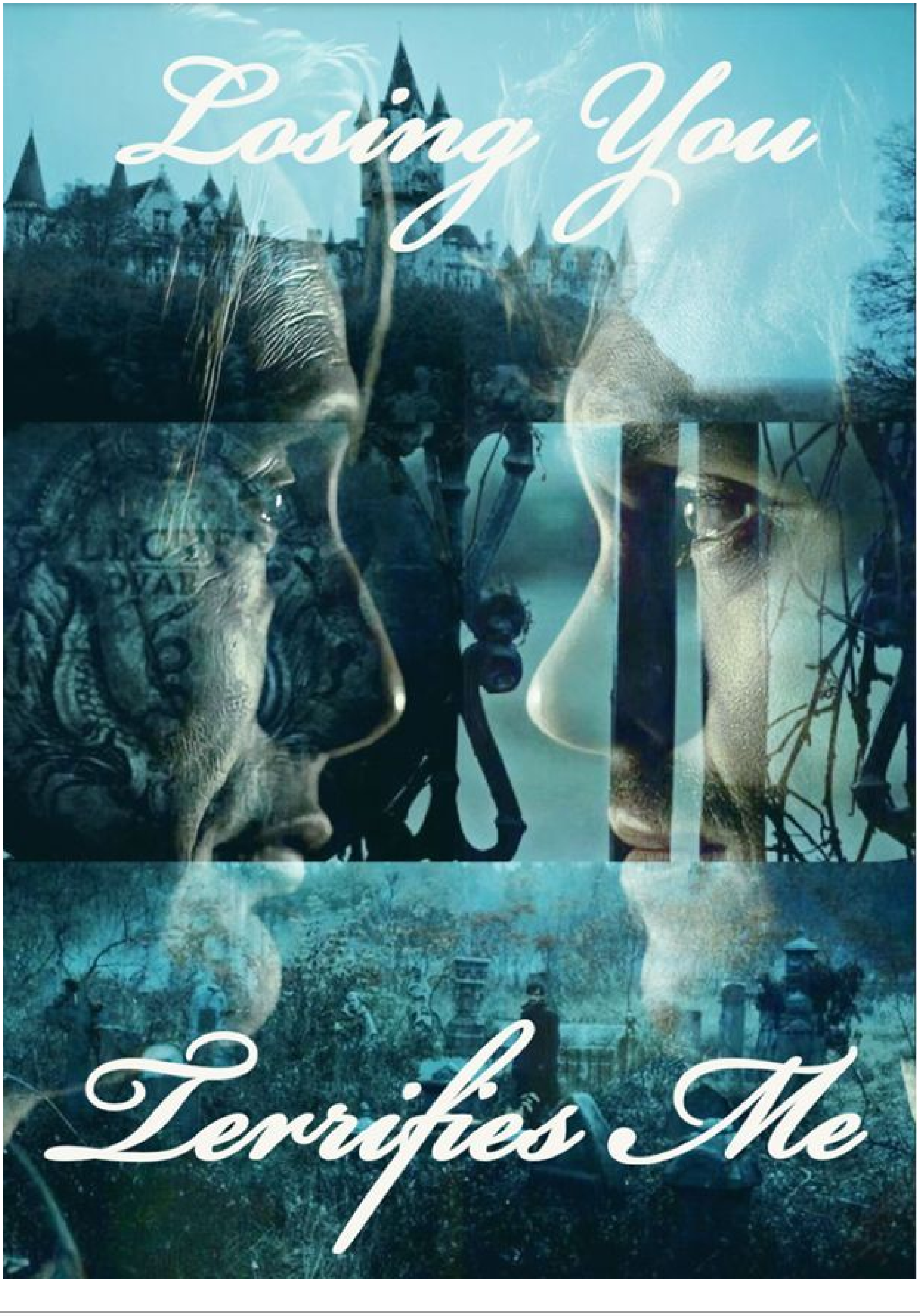
Will spoke, unsure exactly where the harsh words had come from, but knowing that they held all of the truth in them that words had the capacity to hold.

“If my son is missing when I come back, it won’t be Hannibal Lecter who comes after you.”

Chapter 41

Chapter Summary

> He swung his leg up and over the gate, but stopped as his eyes once more caught sight of the castle in the distance, tall above the tree line. It was dark and cold and looked uninviting, as if he would be cursed the moment he decided to take one step closer to it. He was about to climb back down and turn away from the estate when his sister’s voice once more called to him.



The castle loomed overhead. It had sat there day in and day out. Never changing. It looked just as Hannibal had remembered it from his childhood, though a little more overgrown. The plant life had slowly taken back over the carefully manicured gardens.

Hannibal stood at the fence line, unable to so much as build up the courage to touch the rusted gate that had dead and new vines of ivy growing over it to the point where Hannibal knew if he wanted to get in he would have to climb the spires. The thought made him take a small step back and glance over the fence once more, wondering just how Will had done it. He had to have met Chiyoh somehow.

He was curious how far Will had wandered. Will had said that he hadn't stepped foot into the castle, he had stayed more on the grounds where Chiyoh had been staying. Will had mentioned the wine cellar that was off the side of the house and it would be a lie if Hannibal wasn't curious as to what had become of the man that Chiyoh had killed, left in that cellar to rot with the rest of his family's homemade vintages.

For the hundredth time Hannibal glanced over his shoulder, unable to rid himself of the feeling of being watched just like on that last day here in this place. A feeling that there were eyes on him even though he had no idea where they possibly came from.

Shadows among the tree line of his property. The same trees that seemed to have hands that snatched at him and his sister as they had run through the snow in an attempt to escape.

Hannibal glanced up at his home once more before turning away from the gate and trudging through the light wisps of snow and wet leaves that were remaining as spring finally started to claw its way to the surface.

The path was as clear and sharp in his mind as it had been nearly thirty years ago. A right at this tree, a left at that one. A nick across his cheek from a snatching branch of this tree. The tug of his hand against Mischa's as she shivered from the cold of the winter. Numb with wide eyes that Hannibal thought would never be bright again, a red ribbon still tied stubbornly in her hair.

Hannibal's sure footfalls halted when he fell upon the cabin that was dilapidated with the years of disuse and being forgotten, abandoned to the elements just as the rest of his property had been.

The longer Hannibal looked at it, the more it looked like a shed than an actual cabin. Its roof was caving in and the entirety of the building was leaning so far to one side that it was bound to collapse if not now then in the exceedingly near future. The chimney had already given way, the bricks scattered in a line across the ground.

Hannibal stepped up to the door and tugged at it. The wood splintered and cracked under the weight of the walls and roof it was helping hold up, but with enough force, Hannibal finally got the door to begrudgingly open. He had to throw his shoulder into the wood in an attempt to make enough room for him to finally step through.

He had to duck beneath the frame from the angle, but a flash of a man doing the same thing from when he was younger came to his mind. Someone who was just bones now, left somewhere to rot, not even his sister's name carved into his flesh any longer. A man who Hannibal would now be taller than. Had become stronger than. If only he had been stronger all those years ago.

A lump formed in Hannibal's throat as he glanced around the empty room that had snow blanketing the ground and sunlight streaming in from the cracks in the roof and the broken windows.

A single rocking chair was tipped over in the corner, but Hannibal could still hear the way that the wood creaked as it moved, the thud of a knife as it was embedded into the armrest and pulled free again and again and again.

The fireplace was alive with crackling flames and Hannibal's stomach turned at the scent of fresh food cooking. The first meal that wasn't some sad form of hard and stale biscuits in what felt like months, though it had probably only been days.

The ashes still filled the firebox and Hannibal stepped closer at a small hint of red. He was certain that his mind was playing tricks on him, but as he reached out and brushed away shoot and charcoal that turned his fingers black, he was met with dull red ribbon. A ribbon that Hannibal swore had been burnt completely away.

His clean hand snatched at it and pulled the long ago singed ribbon from the dirt and he clasped it to his chest, his ribs wanting to concave in on themselves. The only part of Mischa left that he truly had. A part of a red ribbon that she refused to go a day without it being tied up in her blonde locks.

For the first time since he had stepped foot back in this country since leaving Will, he felt at home. As odd as it sounded and felt, he was at home. Mischa had been his home for so long and it struck him how he had never felt that breath of air the same way he did when Will was around. His body ached at the idea that maybe he would never feel that rush of calm and relief ever again now that both of the people he had loved in his life were both gone from it.

"I'm not gone," a sweet voice said in Lithuanian, causing Hannibal to turn around, eyes wide as he looked over a blonde angel who was no older than eight years old. She gave a giggle, skipping up to Hannibal, her yellow sundress dancing with her movements. She came to a halt with her small hand outstretched. "You found my ribbon, Hanni! I was looking for it."

"Mischa," Hannibal whispered, slowly lowering himself to his knees in the snow. It had been years since he had spoken to her of his own volition. His fever had been another matter entirely. He was certain that with the fever Mischa really had come to take him back home, but he was grateful she had come to understand Will enough to allow him to return to the man. This Mischa was all in his head. He knew that, but she was a welcome sight all the same. "Shall I return it to you?"

"I'd like that. You know it's my favorite!"

Hannibal gave a laugh and a weak nod, eyes dropping to the ribbon still crumpled deep in his fist. "Yes, I know." Hannibal looked back over the young girl, holding back the tears in his eyes. "I'm sorry I couldn't protect you like I should have."

"You were the best big brother I could have asked for, Hanni," Mischa excused easily just as she always had, though it did nothing to lessen Hannibal's guilt. "Can I please have my ribbon back?"

Hannibal pushed himself to his feet, disregarding the icy wetness on the knees of his pants. Instead he took Mischa's still outstretched hand in his and guided her from the place of her death, back out into the extensive forests on the estate.

They wandered about until they reached the gate once more. Chained and overgrown. Hannibal didn't have long to contemplate the movement as Mischa materialized on the other side of the gate, waiting for him to follow, stepping through the muddy field with a bit of a hop to her movements.

"Come on, Hanni!" she called back happily.

Hannibal closed his eyes tightly with a deep breath. Thirty years since he had been on the other side of that gate. He hadn't had much time to think about it then either. Not when officers were chasing him for his crimes across Paris and Florence. Not when he knew he only had a limited amount of time to see his sister once more.

Hannibal inhaled deeply, opened his eyes to find Mischa's blue eyes watching him and waiting from where she stood in a mud puddle, the hem of her yellow dress now smeared in it. He placed the ribbon carefully in one of his jacket pockets before taking some of the vines and hoisting himself up the tall spires of the gate.

His knee ached at the movements, the phantom pains of a surgery clinging to him and he knew that they would stay there. The cold was doing nothing to help, seeming to only cause the new metal in his knee to pain him more.

He swung his leg up and over the gate, but stopped as his eyes once more caught sight of the castle in the distance, tall above the tree line. It was dark and cold and looked uninviting, as if he would be cursed the moment he decided to take one step closer to it. He was about to climb back down and turn away from the estate when his sister's voice once more called to him.

"Hanni!"

"I'm coming," he assured, though making his body move was another case entirely. He swung his other leg over the gate and dropped down into the muddy field, only for his hand to be snatched up by his sister once more.

He was drug away, through trees and past the servant's quarters that were also now in disrepair and falling apart. He didn't stop moving, didn't dare stop moving, until he finally reached their family's plot. Headstone after headstone.

The last time he had seen these graves he had been eighteen and had brought Mischa's bones here to finally be laid to rest. Buried properly. But as he looked over the stone marking that was weather worn and overgrown, shame poured over him. It wasn't enough. Had never been enough. Had simply been good enough because he had to flee Europe. Had to go to America.

"You deserved better," Hannibal muttered, a hand reaching out to touch the cold stone.

"Can I have my ribbon now?" Mischa asked once more, not having either noticed or cared about what Hannibal had just uttered.

"As soon as I fix this."

"Fix what?"

"I'm going to make you a proper grave. Better than this," Hannibal announced, glancing around his surroundings at another feeling of being watched settling into his bones and making the hair on the back of his neck stand up. "Then you can have your ribbon back, Mischa. I promise."

Driving up the coast was odd to say the least. The overwhelming notion of *deja vu* was enough to cause Will to get dizzy and have to pull over once or twice to make sure he didn't vomit. He had never seen a single piece of this land before, never traveled this far north and yet everything had screams smeared across them.

There was an intenseness and permanent haunting as he pushed the further north, driving highways that stretched like ley-lines, everything seeming to tangle and curl back on itself like a loose thread.

The forests around him gave the impression of simply tolerating humans and that the world was one heave away from all of their homes being destroyed. The trees and mountains seemed to eat any sound and for once in his life, Will thought he finally understood why Stephen King wrote all of his stories in Maine.

Cape Elizabeth was a sweet town, with its own secrets and horrors, Will was sure. It had a decent main street business that was nestled in the remnants of a forest up against the rocky coastline. The closer to the coast Will got, the larger the houses grew and the more spread out they became.

The car finally came to a stop and Will stared out of the window at a familiar sight that pulled at the edges of his mind, though there was nothing that sparked to the forefront like he had been hoping.

The weathered paint of the lighthouse was evidence of its humble valor, how it stood resolute upon the rock to tell of dangers others couldn't see. The lighthouse was bathed in brine, pure and salty, season in and season out. Around it were the rocks both proud of the waves and submerged, sharp and jagged out to a cliff face. They were treacherous, an evil repute among sailors. Will wasn't sure he would dare his hand in the water here.

Will's brows furrowed at the deep black mess that lapped at the base of the tower and Will stepped out of the car, making his way towards the building. Hidden around a small grove of trees waited the smothering remains of a home.

The foundation and some of the wooden framing was skeletal in the light of the day, as if an artist sketched it in charcoal. The bulk of the mess had been cleaned away, but the fire that had taken place there had scarred the earth and left several of the trees with singed tattoos.

Any real steps that had once led to the lighthouse were missing now and Will trudged up the steep and rocky path to the climbing beacon whose name Will knew, but couldn't seem to accept. The name of the building would forever be The Watching Star. The name scribed on the paper folded up in Will's pocket.

The door of the lighthouse was just as weather worn as the rest of it and looked nearly untouched. The entirety of this cliff had looked untouched, save for the door handle. Will knew that the lighthouse was still active, but whether from actually having the information stored in his head or just an overwhelming amount of evidence he hadn't consciously put together yet, he wasn't sure.

The door handle held a dirtiness to it. A hand print left on it that didn't belong to any of the keepers, if Will had any guess about it. A hand print that, as odd as it sounded, he recognized. Had stared at many times in ink from prints taken of a prisoner, though he couldn't remember said prisoner. Wasn't even sure there really was a prisoner, but it felt right. Just as everything had felt sickeningly right.

Will reached out to the handle and took it in hand with a deep breath, the taste of the ocean in the inhale. He pushed the door open and stepped into the circular room. The floor was stone, but the place looked decently furnished in the small case that someone possibly wanted to live there. And live there someone had. Recently.

The phantom smell of fresh herbs and spices filled the kitchen, dining room and sitting room that made a circle around a staircase dab in the middle of the room. Will tipped his head curiously and closed the door behind him to keep out the bitter chill from the ocean.

Will cautiously stepped through the room, taking it all in slowly. There was no dust in sight. The dishes looked freshly washed and put away. In the window over the sink there were indeed several potted plants of things like rosemary and thyme and mint. But the scent of the herbs did nothing to hide the much stronger scent that was starting to wash over Will. Not forest or wine or books. Not ocean brine and winter crispness. Something sickly sweet.

He pushed the smell away for a moment more so he could fully explore the lighthouse. Everything else looked oddly normal, but it struck him how oddly normal it was when he came to the small sitting area and found a book on the cushion of a loveseat with a bookmark left in its pages.

Will's brows furrowed slightly, the idea of someone reading aloud to him fluttering across his mind, though he wasn't sure who had ever read aloud to him. It absolutely wasn't his father and it hadn't been Molly. Maybe Alana at one point. He seemed to recall something about a hospital room and a woman who raised peacocks, but that was just as distant as the rest of his memories.

Will picked up the book and looked over it curiously for a moment. It had no markings or indications of what it was. The spine and covers blank save for the black binding over it. There was nearly a warmth to the book, as if someone had just had it cracked open on their laps and was reading it. As if they had just recently set it down and left this place.

Will tipped the book open to where the bookmark was waiting and pulled what looked like an envelope from the pages. Across the front, with the same handwriting as what had adorned the origami heart was Will's name.

But that wasn't what caught his attention immediately. It was a passage marked in the book. Something simply scribbled down in the margin of the book. Will's eyes skimmed the passage.

"Do you understand, sir, do you understand what it means when you have absolutely nowhere to turn?" Marmeladov's question came suddenly into his mind "for every man must have somewhere to turn..."

And in the same handwriting that now processed his life was written,

…everyone needs a somewhere, a place he can go. There comes a time, you see, inevitably there comes a time you have to have a somewhere you can go...

"And where did you go, Hannibal?" Will asked softly, closing the book and setting it on the armrest of the loveseat. Will let himself sit on the cushion and looked over the envelope in his hand. Did he truly want to open it? His son's words had been a fighting force through the constant onslaught of *deja vu.* Hannibal wasn't a good man.

With a long inhale, Will went to work opening the envelope and pulling free the paper inside of it. Through the back of the paper the swirling cursive was present and Will couldn't help but recall having burned one such letter before.

Darling boy,

I miss you terribly, but this will be the last time that I write to you. The universe continues to prove that we weren't meant to be together, but I like to think we almost were.

When I left, I felt lost. I tried to look for you everywhere, but nothing has sparked the same feeling that fills me when I'm near you. I'm returning to someplace that I vowed to never return to in hopes that maybe it can repair me that I might be enough for myself and I no longer have to depend on you for everything that makes me strong.

I don't feel quite myself and I'm afraid that my writing isn't quite as poetic as it normally is, but I don't think that metaphors are quite needed between us any longer. I've grown tired of the roundabout games and wish to be straightforward with you. You deserve it after all of these years of games.

Just as I said in our marriage vows, I am committed to spending the rest of my days making yours beautiful and my leaving is the best way I feel I have to accomplish the task. I didn't want to come between you and your son. The relationship you two have is something special and strong and sincerely reminds me of my relationship with my sister . I would never dream of tearing that away from you.

I hope that your subconscious misses me as much as my consciousness misses you. But we always have a place somewhere in this world, even if it's just the rooms we share in our minds. We made that place for us and I will wait there as long as I need to be able to see you once more my love.

Hannibal Lecter

Will stared at the letter, reread it several more times before it lowered into his lap, his mind reeling with the want to remember this marriage that had been mentioned several times and the need to fix the unnaturalness of a ring missing on his finger.

A church danced somewhere in the back of his mind. Suits and guns and rings. Sirens blared across his memories, but he couldn't exactly place why. Ghostly words pushed themselves forward, bringing with them an onslaught of pain behind Will's right eyes.

He gasped, leaning forward, his palm pressing against his eyes in an attempt to lessen the pain with a bit of pressure, but only being successful in causing patterns to dance across his vision.

"I commit myself to spend the rest of my days making yours as beautiful and complete as you have made mine since the day, I met you, for you are the reflection of my very soul. A reflection of a part that I had lost many years ago and was gone until you gave it back to me. No lies, no secrets, no laws and not even death will keep me apart from you for you and I are one," an accented voice flooded through him.

"Just my son would separate us," Will grumbled, his hand rubbing the back of his neck, fingers tracing an odd scar over his skin that he finally seemed able to place. Similar markings that followed a line down his back. Bite marks from Hannibal. Claiming marks that sent a terrible shiver through the empath at the thought that he had allowed the man that much access to him when Will considered himself a rather vanilla person. He wasn't sure what other task he would have been doing to have Hannibal's teeth that close to his body.

Will inhaled deeply, the sickly sweet scent once more assaulting him like a smelling salt. He sat up fully and got to his feet, letting the letter be placed on the book as he made his way for the staircase that let upwards.

He climbed up it, the scent only growing stronger, but Will found nothing more than a bedroom on the next floor. The room was once more circled around the staircase that continued upward, but Will stepped from it, glancing around the room.

Will nearly continued upwards, almost feeling like he would be intruding on a piece of Hannibal that didn't belong to Will, but his feet led him into the room and he walked over to the bed, once more reaching out to feel at the items that were in the house.

The deep green fabric of the bedspread was soft against Will's rough fingers, a tiredness pulling at his limbs. He sat down on the bed and rested back on it, eyes closed, allowing the plushness of the mattress to drag him further down.

"Get comfortable, mon cher," an accented voice instructed softly, making Will sigh into the air.

Maybe it was the saltiness of the air or maybe Hannibal's room had always smelt of a forest. Something earthy, wild and ancient. Damp moss, rain, wet tree trunks, flowers, and needle-covered paths. A tree stump that was already creating new life, or even snow, frost, and softwood and still clinging from the office, wine and old books... Home.

Will was missing home. He was missing the phantom comfort that came from this man that he wished he knew more about, but was certain he missed Will as much as Will missed him. How did you miss someone you didn't know?

Will clutched to the bedspread, hiding his face in it in hopes that he could ignore the sweetness in favor of whatever was left of his apparition of a husband, but even the calling of forests, wine and books did nothing to deafen a scent that Will knew far too well from his line of work. He had been trying to keep a name from it, but there was absolutely no way to accomplish that task. Maybe he was just buying himself time to be ready for what he would find, what his husband had left behind.

Not a good man.

Will drug himself from the bed and forced himself back to the staircase, starting up it once again. Stair after stair until he reached the third floor that was separated just as the others had been with the continuing staircase in the middle of the room.

Will didn't need to continue upwards though. Not now that the scent had become thick and heavy in the air and he came face to face with fantastical artwork that resonated somewhere deep in his bones from crime scenes he couldn't exactly conjure back up.

It was an image that Will had seen many times in textbooks and online and in documentaries. It was an image that he had longed to see in person when he finally got around to visiting Italy just as he had always wanted to. An image that could have been compared to the original if it hadn't begun to decay.

Two men. One on the right and one of the left. The one on the right was an elderly, yet muscular man with greying hair, wearing nothing more than a light tunic which left much of his arms and legs exposed. He was outstretched and aloft, reaching out towards a much younger naked man, a lounging figure who rather lackadaisically responds to the imminent touch. The touch that would not only give the younger life, but life to all mankind, the birth of the human race.

Michelangelo’s Creation of Adam, or Hannibal’s reimagining of it. With a man that looked far too much like Will for Will to be entirely comfortable. Blue eyes, curly hair, fit but not muscular form. And if Will was meant to be Adam, then he could only assume the God was Hannibal.

Will’s head tipped to the side as he stepped closer. Was this what Hannibal truly looked like? Godly? Was Hannibal that narcissistic that he saw himself as a god? Was Hannibal all commanding and powerful? Was he greying? Old? Strong? He had to have been to create this artwork that was being strung from the ceiling with fishing lines and lures that looked handmade.

They were handmade. Will blinked as he stepped even closer to better look at the miniature artwork embedded in the two men’s skin and his mouth fell open. Those were his lures. Lures he had made. He recognized them perfectly. The red feathers in this one and the deer bones in another. One of his dog’s teeth that had to be pulled on yet another.

Will groaned, a hand going to his right temple as his skull attempted to split in two. He nearly fell to the ground with the force of it, his knees buckling under him. Tears welled up in his eyes and his chest clenched up as if his ribs were concaving.

He had been put behind bars because of his lures. Because of what Hannibal had done to his lures. Will had been trapped behind bars for almost a year because of the missing girl’s hair, nails, earrings and other items being tied into the lures. Pieces of dead girls that Hannibal had killed. Each one pinned on him, made to look so clearly like Will that even Will had begun to believe it.

Will blinked through the tears, trying to catch his breath as he once more took in the bodies.

“What artwork were you going to base me on Hannibal?” Will asked, stepping up behind Hannibal and wrapping his arms around Hannibal’s waist and hiding his face into the back of Hannibal’s sweater between the man’s shoulder blades. “Was I going to be a classic like the man and woman in Florence or was I going to be an original like Isley?”

“I had pictured using you to recreate The Creation of Adam,” Hannibal described. “Only *your body would be fit for such a thing.”*

“Not as God?”

“Adam was painted with such detail it would be a shame for you not to be Adam .”

The last few days have been difficult. Will is currently still in the hospital on oxygen constantly due to a severe case of smoke inhalation. I have just been released and told that I was lucky my burns weren’t worse or covering a larger area. I didn’t need a skin graft, but third degree burns do not concern me.

He’s still on that cliff and I am unaware of how to help him return to the present at this moment in time. Maybe I can try stimulating his senses with something he recognizes.

Will set the fire on the house after he drugged my wine with his own medical supplies. Thankfully he didn't give me enough. I woke and found Will unconscious beside me, hand in mine. The heat was unbearable, thick with smoke. I dragged his body out of the house and a neighbor called for medical help.

The fire.

Will raced back to the stairs, nearly falling down the three flights in his frantic want to be outside. He flung open the creaking, old wooden door and stumbled through the rocks until he was back at the charcoal foundation.

He had set the fire. He had tampered with wiring in the electrical. He had drugged Hannibal's nightly glass of wine. He had lied with the man in the smoke and he had woken up in the hospital. Not a scratch, not a burn, just faint whispers of smoke inhalation until he was somewhere in New York, ripped away from his Watching Star.

Will watched as Hannibal slowly turned around and Will got to his feet at the sight of what looked like a bleached patch of skin that covered up half of the brand that was left behind by Mason Verger. Something raised and scared. Something Will had failed to discover when he had been exploring Hannibal's body previously.

Will reached out with a shaky hand, but stopped himself, unsure on if it was appropriate to touch or not. He didn't have permission. He was being presumptuous. Even with as much touching as Hannibal had been allowing Will, this was something different. Something deeply wounding and personal.

Hannibal waited. "You can touch it, if you would like. It doesn't hurt anymore ."

The world spun and Will wanted to vomit. His head pounded, sharp and heavy under the hand that still clutched to his temple. He closed his eyes, fighting off the nausea. Trying, even through the pain, to remember how he could have arrived at this strange, dark place where nothing seemed familiar, but years of information was at his fingertips.

" There is a pressure point in your wrist; it's called the LU-7. You find it by interlocking your thumb of one hand with that of the other, the point lies on the edge of the index finger, in a depression between the sinew and the bone."

Hannibal's words rang clearly through his head like a bell. It bounced about his skull as his trembling hands followed to obey the instructions. Interlocking thumb with one hand, point lies at index. Will shoved his thumb into the small grove in his wrist that seemed to fit his finger perfectly and gave a whimper as clarity filled him.

He inhaled deeply, straightening up, tears of pain rolling down his cheeks.

"Fuck," he whispered to no one other than himself. The pain might have been gone, kept at bay by a pressure point, but the memories didn't stop. Like a broken dam, they overtook every inch of Will and he sucked in air in the hopes that he wouldn't drown in his own mind. "Fuck!"

His legs shook until his knees finally gave way and he tumbled into the rocky dirt beside the flame licked remains of their home. A home that he had been stitched up in and, though the memories were foggy at best, had grown even closer to Hannibal in.

"We were in a house in Maine. You liked it there," Hannibal's voice explained.

"Did I?" Will whispered.

"You liked to sit by the window that overlooked the coast. You could see a lighthouse from the window."

Will turned back to the lighthouse, seeming to recall in a drugged haze the spinning of the light as it warned ships during massive lightning storms. Warm drinks placed in his hands and then to his lips. Careful touches while thunder crackled through a sky that it tried to split into pieces. Soft conversations about anything and nothing all at once. Simple enough that Will didn't have to speak, simply had to nod or shake his head as he listened.

Will inhaled deeply and forced himself back to his feet and to the lighthouse so he could gather up the letter that had been left there. His hand kept a firm pressure on his wrist, too afraid to take it away when his free hand snatched up the paper from the arm of the love seat, several of the words from the page only sparking more memories to the forefront of his mind.

"From this moment I give my whole self to you," Will whispered, grateful that his voice wasn't cracking with the way that it felt like it would, "to respect you, honor you and cherish all of the life that you and I are about to create for ourselves and the family we are going to be. I promise you that I will always do my best to find my way to you," -Will hoped that Hannibal knew exactly what Will meant and the small tip of Hannibal's lips told Will he did. Will would always find him, whether his mind was on fire, being carved out with a saw or being wiped clean again and again. He would find Hannibal- "for I cannot be myself without you because you are the most beautiful and truest part of myself. I cannot live without you because I know that I can be more with you than I have ever been apart from you."

It hadn't been a lie. Not even now that Will could remember every last little horrible thing that either of them had done to the other could his vow be a lie. He was going to find Hannibal. One way or another. He just had to figure out where to look.

I'm returning to someplace that I vowed to never return to in hopes that maybe it can repair me....

Will’s eyes widened as he read over the letter once more, taking in his husband’s -oh, his dear husband’s- writing.

Lithuania. That was where Will needed to return to, but first he needed this migraine to pass. He needed to let all of the memories finally settle back into place and gauge how he felt. Maybe he needed to read the leather notebook that Alana had given him now that he had a fresh perspective, though he was certain he could quote the entirety of it from how often he had read it before his mind caved in on itself.

He’d get a hotel, rest the next night or two and find Hannibal. Whether another death attempt waited at the end of this encounter, Will couldn’t be certain, but he had promised to always find his husband and Will never broke his promises.

Chapter 42

Chapter Summary

> Will was nearly certain that he was the sole reason that the aspirin industry hadn't crumbled in the last decade and his liver most likely wasn't thanking him for any of it. But he popped the pills anyway, took them dry as he normally did, and stared up at the popcorn ceiling of the hotel room he was in.

Losing You
Terrifies Me

Walter had long ago given up on being found by Morgan in their game of hide and seek. Normally Morgan had Applesauce to help him look and Applesauce made the game go a bit quicker, but Alana had taken to the vet for a checkup.

So now, instead of being found, and he hadn't even picked that difficult of a place to hide, he sat in the cold and slightly muddy dirt and let his finger drag through it until the brown was caked around and under his index fingernail. He was about to give himself up and go find Morgan when some hushed voices caught his attention. His movements stopped and he leaned up against the corner of the house he was hiding behind, pretending like he didn't exist in hopes that they wouldn't notice him.

It wouldn't have been that big of an issue, but they had mentioned him. Not by name of course, he doubted that any of the staff knew his name, but who else could that *strange older boy* be?

"His dad just up and left?" a deep voice asked before there was a rumbling laugh. "Pathetic."

"That just makes our job easier, doesn't it?" another voice asked. This one sent a chill through Walter, reminding him of Mark Hamill's Joker voice. Raspy and sing-songy. "No man in the house. We could handle a couple of kids and the women."

"That wedding ring the bitch is wearing is enough to get us out of debt," the deeper voice expounded, causing Walter's mouth to go dry. He nearly wanted to lean around the wall to see who they were, but couldn't bring himself to unfreeze his body. "Could you imagine what we could do with the whole house?"

Walter blinked blankly ahead, mind completely trapped in the conversation, so much so that he almost didn't notice Morgan rounding the corner of the house. The boy's face lit up as he saw Walter and Walter jumped up, grabbing Morgan and dragging the boy down and into the mud. Walter's hand clapped over Morgan's mouth and he put the muddied finger to his lips to tell Morgan to be silent.

Morgan gave a confused look with brows furrowed over his blue eyes. Walter didn't remove his hand though. He kept it firmly over Morgan's mouth and focused back on the conversation that Morgan had hopefully not interrupted.

"-dinner."

"No one would hear a thing," the deep voice chuckled. "We're so far away from everyone and they have that meat processor in that barn. Easy clean up. The pigs can have them after that."

"Tonight?"

"Too soon," the other argued. "We need to scout out the house a bit more."

"Fine. I'll get my hands on some-"

"Shut the fuck up and get back to work," another voice ordered, this one sterner. "We have to finish shoveling out the pig pens."

"Fuck that shit," the raspier one groaned.

Walter’s focus was torn away from the conversation once more as Morgan tried to pry his hand away with a muffled groan. Walter’s gaze sharpened and he shook his head, once more placing his index finger to his lips to try to silence the boy. Morgan nodded with desperate eyes and Walter let his hand fall away, leaving Morgan’s skin flushed in a perfect handprint.

“Go back to the house,” Walter more mouthed than whispered. “We need to find your moms.”

Morgan gave another unsure nod and got to his feet, the legs of his pants coated in mud. Walter followed, guiding Morgan the opposite way of the voices. Once inside of the house, Walter closed and locked the door behind them, though what good it would do, he wasn’t sure, but it helped settle him just slightly.

“Come on,” he muttered, taking Morgan’s hand and dragging him through the house.

“Wally, you’re getting the floor dirty,” Morgan whined, pulling at Walter’s hand. “Mom will get mad-”

“We can clean the floor later. Come on,” Walter interrupted impatiently, only tightening his grip on the struggling child who had no hopes of ever being stronger than Walter. “Is Margot in the study?”

“She’s in a meeting,” Morgan replied. “We’re not supposed to interrupt, Wally.”

“Were you paying any attention?” Walter scolded as he finally reached the study’s door and took the door handle. On second thought, maybe it was better that Morgan hadn’t paid attention, Walter figured. If Morgan had, then who knew how the child would have reacted.

“Wally, we’re not supposed to-”

Walter pushed open the door to the study, calling several pairs of eyes to him from rather older looking men who were gathered around Margot desk. Her voice faded away as her train of thought was lost and she looked away from the paperwork on her desk and to the two young boys.

A command to wait outside died on her lips at the sight of the seriousness over Walter’s face. A seriousness that she had seen across Will’s features from time to time. Something that told her that this was important and couldn’t wait.

Instead, she rose to her feet and excused herself from the deal she was working on. She stepped around her desk, heading towards the boys and took Walter’s shoulder, leading him from the room, closing the door behind them. Her eyes trailed over Morgan and she gave a small smile and knelt down. A light laugh left her lips and she reached up, brushing some dirt from Morgan’s cheek.

“You look like you two were having fun,” she said kindly.

Morgan nodded eagerly. “We were playing hide and seek.”

“Isn’t Wally the sweetest for playing with you?” Margot gave a sideways glance to the older boy who’s expression had only darkened the longer he was kept silent. Morgan once more nodded in answer and Margot sighed. “How about we go get you cleaned up and I will have someone start work on dinner?”

“Ok!” Morgan agreed eagerly, pulling from Margot’s grip and heading in the direction of his room. “Can we have pizza?”

“We had pizza two nights ago,” Margot reminded, getting back to her feet and letting her hand take Walter’s shoulder to guide him to follow Morgan. Morgan skipped ahead with a shrug that only made Margot smile a bit more.

“We can have it again, can’t we?”

“I will need to ask Alana.”

“But she’ll say no!” Morgan whined as he opened the door to his bedroom, pushing it open far enough for the other two to follow.

“Go get washed up. If you need help, I’ll be right out here,” Margot instructed.

Morgan seemed to freeze at that and Margot’s heart sank at the idea that maybe Morgan would never grow out of his fear of water. Morgan turned back with wide and worried eyes and before Margot could say anything, Walter stepped over to the young boy.

“Stop being such a child. Go and shower. It’s perfectly safe,” Walter instructed, pointing to the bathroom door.

“But-but-” Morgan glanced behind him to where Walter was pointing. “I’m not a child.”

“Then what are you?” Walter challenged, though there was no bite to his voice.

“I’m a big boy!”

“Big boys take showers without being scared.”

Margot opened her mouth to speak, but the taunting had obviously done its job. Morgan gave a huff and folded his arms over his chest before heading to the bathroom with pouting footsteps.

“Let me know if you need help,” Margot called out after the boy before the door was shut. With a deep breath, her eyes returned to Walter who looked about ready to pop. “What’s wrong, Wally?”

He inhaled deeply, the words coming out in a rush that was like a damn breaking. “I was hiding and there were some workers that were talking and I overheard them and they said that they had debts that they were trying to get out of and that your wedding ring could pay for the debts and that everything was going to be easier to do now because my dad had left and that they were going to wait until after dinner to do something. They said no one would hear anything because of how far away the house was from everyone else and-and-”

“Slow down,” Margot instructed, sitting on the edge of Morgan’s bed to be more at Walter’s height. “What workers?”

“I-I didn’t see them. I was hiding over by the edge of the fence line before the big barn. I could only hear them.”

“Ok.” Margot gave a nod, hand brushing back Walter’s hair from his face, but it only fell back down into his golden eyes and across his freckled nose. “When Alana gets home we three will get together and speak. We’ll come up with something then, alright?”

“But I-”

“I need to return to my meeting, Wally. I promise that the three of us will talk.”

“Alright,” Walter sighed, resigned. He looked down at the floor. “Morgan didn’t understand any of it, if that makes you feel better.”

As if on cue, a muffled voice called from the other side of the door. “Mom!”

“Coming dear!” Margot returned, getting to her feet. “Thank you, Wally. I want you and Morgan to stay in here until either Alana or I come and get you, do you understand? I want the door locked and it only opens to one of us.”

Walter perked up and nodded at that. “Al-alright.”

“Good.” Margot made her way towards the bathroom door, her heels clicking on the floor. “I’ll order you boys some pizza. Promise me you’ll both be good and obedient.”

“Promise,” Walter agreed.

Margot gave Walter a smile that quickly fell as she stepped into the bathroom, closing the door behind her. She turned to face her young son who was undressed with the shower running, but clutching himself tightly in a hug while rocking where he sat on the floor.

“I can be a big boy,” he muttered, shaking his head in disagreement, eyes tight on the falling water. “I can be a big boy.”

“Dear, it won’t hurt you,” Margot said in a gentle voice, stepping closer to her son and lowering herself to her knees, her arms scooping up the young child in a tight embrace. There was a gasp and a sob from the boy who quickly shifted in Margot’s arms to hug her. His cries were loud and echoed off the tile in the room. “I know this is difficult for you,” Margot whispered, her hand cradling the back of Morgan’s head against her chest, muffling his cries slightly. “Shhh,” she instructed as she pressed a kiss to his head and rocked him, hoping it would soothe him even just slightly. “Shhh. Morgan, it’s alright.”

“I don’t like water!” he all but shouted into Margot’s shirt and she frowned at the dampness that was coming from the boy’s tears. “Please don’t make me. Please. I don’t want to go back in the water!”

“Quiet, my dear.” Margot shifted until she was sitting on the bathroom floor, her son in her lap. She continued to rock him as she leaned him back enough to look at his face that was scrunched up with tears rolling down his cheeks. With her free hand, she wiped at the wetness over his cheeks. “Hush, my dear. Everything is as it should be.”

Morgan shook his head and tried to hide himself away in Margot’s chest again, but she stopped him. Her index finger found the bridge of his nose and slowly caressed down it and then back up, between his eyebrows before following the same pattern back down. The action had started more as a desperation one night when Morgan was just born and wouldn’t sleep and it seemed to have worked well enough and so she had continued to use it. It calmed the boy enough to talk him through things.

“Morgan, my love, you need to shower. You need to be clean,” Margot pressed on softly. The boy’s face un-scrunched and slowly turned to something softer, though the tears didn’t stop flowing. “You don’t have to take baths, but I need you to be strong and shower for me. It won’t hurt you. You can breathe the whole time. I promise.”

“Mommy....” he whined, shaking his head.

“Shhhh,” Margot cooed once more, still petting over Morgan’s nose. “Walter is going to watch you when you get out of the shower while I finish my meeting. I’ll get you some pizza as well. I will visit you when I am done with my meeting. Can you be my big boy and shower for me?”

“Yes,” Morgan whispered, sniffling.

“Good.” Margot leaned forward and kissed Morgan’s nose, causing the boy to giggle. “I’m so proud of you. You’re so strong, Morgan. Never forget that, ok?”

“Yes, Mommy.”

“Alright. I need to go. Be good for Walter. I’ll see you again in a few hours, alright?” Margot kissed the boy’s forehead and he hopped from her lap. She watched as he stared at the water with dislike before taking a deep breath and plunging into the steady stream. “Good job, my dear.”

“Love you, Mommy.”

“I love you too, baby boy.” Margot straightened herself up slightly, ignoring the wet spot in her shirt, and left the bathroom that was beginning to turn into a sauna with the amount of steam that had gathered. She closed the door behind her and looked over where Walter sat at the foot of Morgan’s bed, picking at dried dirt under his fingernails. “I’ll be back as soon as my meeting is done. I’ll make sure you have some food, alight?”

“Lock the door and don’t answer for anyone but you or Alana,” Walter muttered with a nod, his eyes flicking up from his work and to Margot long enough to show he understood what was going on before they returned to his work.

“Perfect.” Margot gave a small nod before leaving the room and waited for the sound of the door to lock before heading back in the direction of her study. Her shoes seemed to echo down the halls hauntingly as she pulled her phone from her slacks and dialed Alana’s number.

“Hello,” Alana said, a bit distracted on the other side of the line. “I thought you were going to be in a meeting for the next hour or so.”

“I was, but the boys interrupted,” Margot explained, dragging out her short distance into something a bit longer.

“Oh,” Alana’s voice answered with a bit of disappointment behind it. “I would have brought them with me if I would have known they would-”

“We need to talk when you get home,” Margot interrupted, one arm wrapping around her middle in an attempt to keep herself feeling whole, the scarring across her stomach giving a phantom twinge where it hadn’t healed quite right.

There was a hint of suspicion across the line. “Talk?”

“Would you mind bringing home some pizza and dropping it off in Morgan’s room? I promised them pizza.” Margot found herself outside of her study door and began pacing. “Then come find me. I’ll be in the study.”

There was a deep breath. “Not a good talk then.”

“Important, is more like it. Just get home soon.”

“Alright. I love you,” Alana said with a deep breath.

“I love you too.”

* * *

The dog’s tags jingled as Applesauce rushed into the house, obviously far happier with being home than Alana felt. She closed the door behind her with a pizza box balanced on one hand, her bag in the other. She made her way through the multitude of hallways before she finally reached Morgan’s room, taking the door handle and turning it to only find it locked.

“Boys, let me in please,” she called through the wood, a pounding deep in her chest that knocked the air from her lungs.

“Coming!” a faint voice called and there were hurried footsteps to the door before it was unlocked and pulled open to reveal a serious looking Walter. A boy who had been given a task and was going to complete it to the best of his abilities, though Alana wasn’t exactly certain what that task was.

The dog pushed past Alana’s legs, nearly tripping her in an attempt to get through the bedroom door. Walter let the animal pass and Alana could see Morgan jump from his bed with a laugh, hugging the dog when it got close enough.

“Margot’s still in her meeting,” Walter explained in the same factual tone that he always used with Alana, but Alana did her best to hold back her slight annoyance with how closed off the child always was with her.

“Here’s some food,” Alana said, holding out the box of pizza. “Please do not let him eat more than a slice. He’s had enough junk the last few days. He doesn’t need anymore.”

Walter’s brow rose in curiosity. “No command for me?”

“I would rather you didn’t eat all of it either, but I can’t make you do anything you don’t want to do,” Alana answered as Walter took the warm box from her grip. “And please don’t let Applesauce eat any.”

“Right.” Walter took a step back and moved to close the door, but Alana stopped the movement with a hand pressed flat against the wood. “What?”

“Do you know what’s going on?”

“Margot said we’d talk about it after her meeting.”

Alana gave a small nod. So he did know. Probably knew more than either of them about whatever it was that was going on. Alana chewed on her tongue for a moment before giving a nod and releasing her hold on the door. She turned around to head for Margot’s office, but paused at the sound of the door locking behind her.

She tried not to give it too much thought as she walked to her wife's study and quietly entered the room. Alana's presence quickly broke up the meeting and Alana waited for all of the men to leave the room before she turned toward the desk. Margot met Alana's gaze and a breath left the woman as she rose to her feet.

“This conversation is going to be difficult,” Margot explained as the two women made their way back towards Morgan's room. “We need to keep Morgan busy while we talk.”

“That bad?” Alana asked, unsure what else to say as her blood ran cold. She knew that something had to be coming for them the moment that Will had shown back up in that hospital room, but she had been hoping that their time in this place hadn't come to an end quite as quickly. They had been prepared for such a thing, and had always been prepared.

“I believe so,” was Margot's reply as she knocked on the boy's bedroom door and gave Alana the needed information as to why it had been locked. “Please open the door, Wally.”

“One second!” his voice called back before there were footsteps and the click of the door. It was pulled open and Alana gave a small smile at the small bit of marinara sauce that was down the boy's chin. Walter stepped back and allowed the women in, heading back to the bed where Morgan was sitting, with one hand petting Applesauce's head that was in his lap and the other holding obviously the largest cut slice of pizza from the box.

“Mother!” Morgan called happily through a mouthful when he saw her. The dog perked up just a bit before laying back down across the boy's lap. “Missed you.”

“I missed you too, love,” Alana answered, sitting on the bed beside Morgan and brushing his hair from his face with a smile. She snatched up a brown napkin and took Morgan's chin in her hand, wiping at the mess over his face with a small laugh. “When I said one piece-”

“It is one piece!” Morgan assured as he ungracefully shoved more pizza into his mouth proving to Alana exactly the reason she had the rule of only allowing Morgan to eat in the kitchen or dining room. Some of the toppings had dropped onto Applesauce's head and the dog jumped up, doing its very best to lick at the mess that it couldn't quite reach. Morgan giggled and Alana quickly swiped the slice away from the boy and rested it back into the box.

“Go clean up and help Applesauce,” Alana instructed, pointing towards the bathroom.

“Ok!” Morgan agreed and jumped up to obey. “Come Applesauce.” The dog gave a small bark and hoped from the bed to follow Morgan into the bathroom where the door was closed behind the two of them.

Alana looked over Walter who had a smile on his face as he reached for another slice of pizza. Alana gave a fond sigh and took another napkin, reaching out to take Walter's face in her hands too, cleaning off his chin. Walter froze momentarily with wide eyes and once he was released from Alana's grip, he faltered, becoming small and returning the pizza to the box.

Maybe I stepped too far, Alana thought as she added the second dirty napkin to the one in her fist to be thrown away after they had gotten down to business.

“Wally, can you tell Alana exactly what you told me?” Margot questioned gently with a kind smile across her lips. Something small and barely there, but Walter had come to recognize those micromovements across Margot's face. He had gotten rather good at reading them and had slowly come to the conclusion that Hannibal operated the same way. Everything was small and calculated. Hannibal's to keep himself hidden away so no one would see the monster, Margot's to protect herself from the monsters that were chasing her. "Please?"

Walter gave a small nod and a deep breath. "I overheard two workers talking about..." Walter trailed off and his brows scrunched up in thought and Alana watched silently as he licked his lips. "They were talking about how they were in debt and that one of your wedding rings would be worth more than enough to get them out of debt. They said that they wanted more from the house and would do something after dinner. They said it would be easier now that my dad was gone. I didn't hear when they would do this."

Alana was quiet as she let the words soak in, trading a look with Margot, knowing that Margot had come to the same conclusion that she did. "Alright," Alana said with a nod, a hand reaching out to give Walter's knee a small squeeze. "I need you to listen very closely to me. This is about keeping all of us safe, alright?"

Walter's eyes narrowed suspiciously, but he nodded in answer. "Ok."

"We're going to pack up our things and by the end of this week-"

"We'll move," Walter interrupted Alana. "You must have a million safe houses like Hannibal does."

Margot gave the small boy a kind lipped smile. "Not nearly a million, but we have options."

"What about my dad?" Walter asked, looking between both Alana and Margot who both seemed to share another hidden conversation just as Walter had seen Will and Hannibal do together as well. "Is he going to know where we are? Are you going to get a hold of him or...?"

Walter already knew the answer before it was said in the air. It was easy enough to read on Alana's face and in the space around him. No. It was that simple. They wouldn't tell Will where they went. Walter knew that they didn't trust Will, but he hadn't thought that he would end up being kidnapped away from his own father who had fought so hard to keep him.

"He'll find me," Walter announced, back straightening in absolution. "One way or another, he will come after me if he comes back and we're not here."

Before either Alana or Margot could answer the bathroom door opened and both Applesauce and Morgan raced back out, the dog's head soaking wet and of course Applesauce waited until they were both back by the bed before shaking dry.

"Morgan, love," Alana said, wiping water from her cheek before scooping her son up off the floor and into her lap. She let the boy reach back out for his slice of pizza and allowed him to settle before she dared to speak again. "We need to have a serious conversation, alright?"

"Alright," Morgan said nonchalantly as he took another bite of his pizza.

"Do you remember what we spoke about when Dr. Lecter first came to our house?" Alana questioned, nuzzling her face into her son's cheek. Morgan hummed with a nod in answer around another bite of pizza. "We talked about maybe having to go away to stay safe, didn't we?"

"Yes," Morgan said slowly, looking up at Alana in confusion. "Do we need to leave?"

“Yes dear,” Margot replied with a nod. “We need to go away.”

Morgan’s eyes went wide and he lowered the slice back to the box, looking between everyone in the room before his eyes rested on Walter as if Walter had a say or could help in some way.

“Can Wally come with us?” his small voice inquired, a glimmer of hope in it as if Walter was the only thing that could make the move bearable.

“Yes,” Walter said with a nod, calling three pairs of surprised blue eyes to his face. “I will come with you.”

Morgan’s face cracked into a bright smile and he bounced in Alana’s lap. “Where can we go? Can we see something new?”

“Yes, love,” Alana answered. “Of course we can see something new.”

Walter did his best to hide the way his heart dropped into his stomach about how far away they would be going. Will would find him, he had no doubt at all that Will would search the world for him, but he couldn’t help but wonder if maybe Will might not be able to find him. What if he was moved to a safe house that not even Hannibal or Will Lecter could find?

* * *

It was beautiful to look at and Hannibal regretted not having had the courage to find it sooner. The cellar was cold, but not even the temperature had kept the man suspended above the air from decomposing. Not even the bitter winter had kept the bugs and rodents from eating away at the man’s body whose hands were held at heart’s center.

But the decomposition wasn’t bad enough to distract from the hard work that Will had put into the design. Hannibal kept his distance due to the smell, but he did take a few steps closer to better look over the work in the dim light in the wine cellar.

Broken wine bottles of his family’s own vintages made up the firefly’s wings, catching the light of the candles that Hannibal had lit. The light that passed through the dusty green glass was dimmed, discolored, distorted, and gorgeous.

And the rope work that had been used around the man’s limbs reminded Hannibal greatly of the art of shibari, something that he hadn’t seen used since he used to live with his aunt who liked to practice it as a form of self-discipline.

Hannibal’s head tipped to the side and he reached out, not touching, but allowing his fingers to hover through the air and trace the ropes carefully, respectfully. How had Will learned how to tie the knots? Had it come from years of fishing and working on boats? Had Chiyoh shown Will how to tie the knots? Chiyoh had always been rather close to Lady Murasaki and if his aunt had taught him how to practice shibari, then Hannibal had no doubt that she had also taught Chiyoh. Or maybe Will had always had a secret affinity for bondage that Hannibal hadn’t had much of a chance to explore.

The idea put a smile on Hannibal’s lips before he took another sip from one of the dusty wine bottles in his grip. He had wished he could have been stronger, but he knew that not even his courage alone could have gotten him into somewhere as simple as this. The ground was one thing, climbing the fence had been difficult but doable. But entering the buildings on the grounds had been so incredibly impossible that Hannibal had been keeping himself fairly drunk on his family's own wine.

His disoriented state did nothing to subtract from Will's design though. Hannibal held tightly to it and read into each and every line that Will had left behind for him to find. A symbol of Will's metamorphosis. A tableau dedicated to Will's evolution and Hannibal couldn't help but see the reach towards himself in the artwork. Will's calling card, invitation, and love letter to Hannibal. The empath trying to prove how invested he was in going deeper into uncovering the history that made Hannibal who he was.

Another Japanese term that Hannibal hadn't thought of in many years jumped to the forefront of his mind and he wondered if maybe all the alcohol was helping to bring back even more suppressed memories that he had long since locked away. But honestly, why not? He was already using a crowbar to tear his mind to shreds in hopes of repairing it, but not add a little more gasoline to the fire?

Hotaru, a metaphor for passionate love, poetically speaking. Will might not have known the hidden meaning behind the intentions, but Hannibal smiled at the idea of Chiyoh seeing all of this and knowing long before they met again that Will meant the world to him. That they were entertained, tangled with nooses around their necks in a red thread of fate.

Hannibal shook his head with a chuckle and took another drink of the wine bottle to find it empty. What did it matter? There were plenty more if he so wished to use the liquid courage to help blur his pain. He let the bottle fall from his hands and clink across the floor, unshattered, his body joining it.

He leaned back enough that he could stare up at the creation his beloved had left behind, smile still playing at his lips. What a cunning little boy Will was. His design was beautiful and precise with as much hidden meaning to it as what Hannibal added to his own work.

"Hanni, I don't like it down here," a tiny voice whispered in his ear, a hand tugging at his shoulder to get him to move. "Can we go back outside?"

Hannibal glanced back at the small version of his sister and wondered if this really was an exact recreation of her or if maybe he had just imagined what he wanted his sister to be and the real her was lost to time. After all, he had forgotten her for a time. As long as he had been mute he had suppressed her memory and now he couldn't help but be curious if his mind had damaged her in the process.

"I don't like when you drink that stuff, Hanni," she continued, giving another small tug. "It makes you act funny like dad used to sometimes."

"Forgive me," he whispered in the empty space around him, eyes still on the man before him. "This is difficult for me."

"Can I have my ribbon back now, please?"

"Almost. We're almost done, I promise." Hannibal let out a deep breath and pushed himself back to his feet, hands out to keep him steady as the cellar spun around him. "And then you can sleep and maybe I can move on as well."

Will was nearly certain that he was the sole reason that the aspirin industry hadn't crumbled in the last decade and his liver most likely wasn't thanking him for any of it. But he popped the pills anyway, took them dry as he normally did, and stared up at the popcorn ceiling of the hotel room he was in.

He could hear the hand on his watch ticking through the silent room, the only sounds to rival it being the next room's occupants watching the TV. The noises were muffled by the paper thin walls enough that it didn't cause Will much annoyance.

He wasn't sure if he could lay here for much longer without going out of his mind and the ticking of his watch only seemed to accent the fact that he still had another hour or two before he could head for the airport. Another two hours before he either was allowed onto a plane bound for Europe or if he would find himself locked up behind bars for the potential kidnapping of his own son. The very same son who was an absolute gift in his life and he had not been cherishing enough.

That would change the moment Will returned with Hannibal. They would take Walter and Walter would be the very center of everything, just as he deserved to be. Walter would come first, Will would make sure of it and he knew Hannibal would agree, obey, submit to that specific demand, just as Hannibal always had.

Hannibal would breathe, live and die at Will's command. Hannibal's use of possessiveness was not as terribly complicated as Will had once thought it was. All of it was done with Will's consent. They shared everything, spoke about everything, wandered each other's mental spaces and Will could feel the explanation whenever Hannibal looked at him, down to his bones. Hannibal's voice echoed through Will's skull, even when he wasn't fully present in it. Will had always happily complied with Hannibal's attempts at manipulation, understanding under it all that he merely had to ask and Hannibal would give him whatever he desired.

And this was what Will desired. His husband and his son and their life to start anew. A life far away from the prying eyes of the FBI and Jack Crawford. A life separated from all the court files and the news articles. A life where maybe they could be as normal of a family as was possible being married to a man like Doctor Hannibal Lecter.

They would be well taken care of. They had the means to live comfortably for the rest of their lives. They probably wouldn't be able to stay in the same place for longer than a year or so, but it would just give them the opportunity to see more of the world. Walter could learn so much. It would be good for him. Will had always thought that learning from the world was more important than being stuck in a school system that punished children for not learning a certain way.

Walter would succeed in whatever he put his mind to and the two of them would homeschool Walter. He would learn what was really important in life. He would learn the value of hard work and how to appreciate the small things in life. That was what Will wanted for him. For Walter to have everything that Will hadn't been able to have. A good education and a life worth living.

An alarm went off on Will's phone and the empath sat up, turning it off before gathering up his small backpack of belongings and his plane ticket. With a deep breath, he went for the door of the hotel room and stepped out into the hallway, ready for the next step of his journey to take place, as if the rest hadn't already been more than enough for a lifetime.

Chapter 43

Chapter Summary

> Thank you for being so good for me, Mischa. I promise I'll take care of you. Let's just play hide and seek a little bit longer."

LOSING
YOU
TERRIFIES
ME

Morgan stared at the small collection of stuffed animals that he had. Nothing too fantastic. Just a teddy bear and a bunny and then an elephant from one of his uncles on Alana's side. He didn't like the man much. Thomas was his name and he smelled far too strongly of mint for Morgan's liking. Chewed on the leaves. Alana had explained that a girl had made fun of him for his breath, so he had taken to chewing on mint leaves to help with the issue. Morgan didn't care much for the elephant. The amount of wear and tear to the teddy bear and the bunny were enough to prove just how much the boy loved the two of them over the third.

He had been given the task to only bring one at first and that the other two would be brought later to wherever they were going, but Morgan found himself sitting in front of the three of them with his legs and arms crossed in a pout as he tried to decide.

He had made sure to wait until later that night when Walter was asleep in his own room before he set off on the task because he knew that Walter would tease him for the fact that he still had stuffed animals. That was just how Walter was. He didn't think that Walter did it on purpose, but he would rather that the air between them stayed good rather than tense like Walter liked to keep it.

Morgan sighed, head tipping to the side as he stared at the three. He reached out and knocked over the elephant so he could focus between the two he actually liked. One from Alana and one from Margot from when he was born and Morgan supposed that the reason he couldn't choose was because he thought he would be picking between his own mothers. Like it was a test that would tell his mothers exactly which one he liked more, which wasn't fair in the slightest.

Instead, he found himself wandering his way through the house in search of a single person who might actually listen to him, if the older boy didn't laugh first. It was always a possibility. And even if he did tease, he was a safer bet than either Alana or Margot.

He opened Walter's bedroom door and stepped into the dimly lit room where Morgan found the older boy sitting up in his bed, a book was left tumbled on the floor and head back against the headboard where he had fallen asleep. The lap light sent shadows over Walter's face making it look hallow. Morgan hesitantly stepped closer to the bed.

"Wally?" he asked in a whispered voice. The older boy stirred just slightly, mumbling something in his sleep, but he didn't do much else. Morgan sighed before reaching out and shaking Walter's shoulder. Walter jumped upright with a gasp and that only caused Morgan to jump in turn, his heart pounding in his chest.

"What?" Walter asked with a groan, rubbing at his eyes. "I thought you were asleep."

"Can't sleep," was all Morgan had to say before the older boy's caramel eyes flickered open to take in Morgan. Morgan fought the urge to shrink back at the momentary judging look in those eyes, but the look quickly turned to something much softer and there was an annoyed sigh.

"Come here," Walter instructed softly, shifting so that there was room on the bed far end of the bed that already had plenty of room. "Go to sleep," Walter instructed, causing Morgan to only feel confused once more.

"Here?"

"Where else?" Walter lied down fully and pulled the covers up and over his head.

"You don't like when I-"

“Will you shut up? I’m trying to be nice.”

Morgan frowned. He slowly obeyed, climbing over to the other side of the bed and slipping beneath the covers. There was a click as the light was turned out and Morgan blinked up at the ceiling above them.

“Wally?” he asked softly. There was a groan in answer and Morgan frowned. He was always in the way, always an annoyance. Morgan tried so hard not to be, but the feeling never truly ever went away. It always sat heavy in his chest and ran round and round in his head. “I’m sorry.”

“Just tell me,” Walter’s voice said through the darkness.

“What’s going to happen with your dad?” It wasn’t the question that Morgan had meant to ask, but it was a safer one than having Walter think of him as a child.

There was a tense silence and Morgan turned away from Walter, not wanting to face the brunt of whatever outburst the older boy would give. Morgan often found that Walter was just one word away from an explosion and Morgan tried to understand why Walter was always so upset and he supposed that losing a mom would be hard, but now Walter had two dads, so it couldn’t be all bad. Could it?

“I don’t know,” a small voice replied and Morgan’s brows rose at the softness of Walter’s tone. “He’ll come find me. And your moms are nice. I’ll be alright, I think.”

“I like Will,” Morgan announced with a decided nod. “He’s smart.”

“Incredibly smart,” Walter agreed, voice still just as soft, hurt in a way if Morgan had to guess. Could he help make it better? “What were you doing up?”

“I...” Morgan started before catching himself and pulling his bottom lip between his teeth for a moment of hesitation. “Nothing. You’ll just laugh.”

“I won’t laugh.”

Morgan’s nose scrunched up and he flipped back around in the bed to face Walter who had turned to look at him as well. “You always laugh.”

“I won’t laugh.”

“My mother said I was only allowed to bring one stuffed animal with us and the rest would be brought when the movers got our things and I couldn’t pick,” Morgan muttered out, pulling the blanket closer against his chest and clutching it tightly in his small fists.

“How many do you have?” There was no hint of laughter in Walter’s words and it caught Morgan a bit off guard. He had figured that even after telling him, Walter would still laugh.

“Two.”

And there was the laughter that Morgan had been expecting. “Just ask if you can take both of them,” he suggested. “I’m sure two wouldn’t be that big of an issue. I’ll hide one in my bag if I need to.”

“You mean it?” Morgan asked excitedly, sitting up with a smile. “Thank you Wally!”

“Yeah,” Walter muttered. “Get some sleep kid.”

“Do you have anything that-”

“No,” Walter quickly interrupted. “I don’t have anything.”

Morgan hummed in thought. That was true. Walter didn’t really own anything. He had a small bag with some clothes in it, but nothing else. No toys, no games, no books, nothing. But Walter did have something. Something that he kept around his neck constantly.

“What about the rings?” Morgan asked into the quiet room. The air stiffened once more. “The ones around your neck. You haven’t taken them off since you came here.”

There was a shaky inhale and Walter shrugged in the dark of the room, voice distant. “What about them?”

“Those must be important.”

“They belonged to my dad and my mom.”

Morgan closed his eyes and swiftly turned away from Walter. Why was he such a screw up? Why did he always pick things that hurt Walter to speak about? “I’m sorry Wally. I didn’t-”

“It’s fine. Would you please just sleep now? We need to pack tomorrow.”

“Ok,” Morgan whispered, pulling the blankets even further around him. “Night.”

“Night kid.”

* * *

The smile didn’t leave Hannibal’s face as he continued to work. The spring sun was finally starting to lend enough warmth that Hannibal didn’t need his coat as he once more stirred up a mixture for concrete in an old and rusted wheelbarrow that he had found forgotten at the edge of his mother’s long ago overgrown garden.

The shovel dug through the mixture with a scraping sound as the dust churned with the water and turned into something thicker and darker. Hannibal paused for a moment as his eyes caught movement and his smile only seemed to grow. Mischa’s golden hair caught the sunlight like a beacon and her voice was sweet and soft as she sang old Lithuanian folk songs that his mother had taught them when he was still quite young. In her hands were a multitude of flowers that she had been dashing about and picking. Wild things that seemed to bloom right under her fingers whenever she would reach for some place still bare.

“Come play with me,” the young girl called impatiently, looking up from the unruly bouquet in her hands and a smile on her lips. “Please, Hanni. Come play with me.”

“Work and then play,” Hannibal said kindly before returning to mixing the material in the wheelbarrow. Lithuanian had felt a touch odd on his tongue at first, but now flowed freely from him. It was nice in a sense. Another way to be closer to his home. “Once I finish this, we can play.”

“But you’ve been at it for days!” Mischa complained lightly, her flowers lowering slightly in her grip in disappointment. Hannibal glanced around at the work he had done and what still lay ahead of him. A foundation and the first few layers of thick, light colored granite blocks that now came up to about his hips. "Please."

Hannibal chuckled and shook his head. "Let me use the concrete I've already made and then we'll play. I promise, Mischa."

Mischa sighed and dropped herself into the tall grass, crossing her legs and looking over the flowers in her hands. Hannibal went back to work, scooping some of the liquid stone to spread out on the waiting line of granite to start another row.

"Who is that boy you were with?" Mischa's voice called to Hannibal as he used both hands to pull the heavy stone from its stack to add it to the new stack. Hannibal paused for a moment, looking over his sister before heaving the stone up and into place.

"Will?" he asked, using a trowel to clean up the concrete and spread more out. "My husband?"

"No. I know Will." Mischa's nose scrunched up as she shook her head. "He took you from me. I was talking about the other one. The younger one."

"Walter?" Hannibal once more paused, perplexed as his attention returned yet again to the young girl who he knew was strictly in his mind, though she looked so solid. Mischa didn't look up from the crown she was weaving with the flowers in her hands, but she gave a nod. "That's Will's son."

"Yours?"

"I suppose in a roundabout way." Hannibal exhaled deeply, hands resting on his hips. "What are you getting at?"

"Why did you leave them?"

Hannibal was taken aback by the question. Especially by the way his own subconscious had decided to ask it. Did it really have to come through his sister's voice? Did all of the difficult questions always have to come from her?

"I thought that they would be better off without me."

The words came far easier from Hannibal than he thought that they would. The answer was far more simple than it should have been as well. But then again, Hannibal had always known himself rather well. He had always known the reasonings behind everything he did and this was no different, though it felt odd.

"What made you think that?" Mischa questioned innocently, lifting up her crown to inspect it.

"Because I'm the entirety of why everything continually gets worse around the two of them," Hannibal replied softly, starting to work once more. "They don't need that in their lives and I don't want to force it onto either of them."

"What do you want then?" Mischa asked, the question somehow far too old to be asked from her lips and somehow just childish enough to make sense.

Want. What did Hannibal want? He wanted a lot of things, he conceded. He wanted to see Florence again, but knew he needed to wait for the heat to die down there as well before he would ever have the chance. His mind would be his only view of Florence for the time being.

He wanted Mischa to be alive again. As wonderful as it was to have her dancing about with him here, it just brought an ache to his chest that it was all in his head. And he knew it was. She was never going to come back again, but he figured he must have had a problem that he needed to solve and she was the best way to solve it just like the ghosts that seemed to live in Will's mind.

He wanted to have enough courage to step into his family's home again. It still sat in the distance, tall and big and overbearing as if it had eyes to watch him work. It judged him for not being man enough to face his demons. But he had done more than enough facing in the last little while to want to do anymore of it. He could still recall the horrendous pounding of the hangover he had when he had drunk enough wine for twelve of him just to get into that wine cellar to see Will's design.

He wanted to finish this tomb for Mischa. His sad excuse of a grave had always sat heavy in the back of his mind, but he hadn't had the chance to do something better for her. The police were on his trail, not that now was any different, but he hoped that with the way that the authorities liked to continue to drag their perfect hound dog into the mess, that he would have quite a bit more time before they found him. After all, he doubted Will would remember. He was fairly certain that Alana and Margot would have put in place similar rules for Will that Molly had. Maybe not going as far as to block websites, but Hannibal doubted that there was any internet in that entire estate and if there were, it was strictly for business uses.

He wanted to be with Will. Above everything else, that was what he wanted. From the moment Will had stepped into Jack's office, Hannibal had needed Will like he needed water to live. Will was as essential as breathing and it had been harder to inhale deeply and freely without the man there beside him. It wasn't healthy, but Hannibal honestly didn't care. As long as he was with Will, that was all that mattered. As long as Will was happy, and Hannibal would clean the ground Will walked on with his tongue if it made Will happy, then Hannibal would be happy. The two of them together was something he wanted.

And lastly, among many other things, Hannibal wanted to know Walter. Maybe wanted wasn't quite the right word. He was intrigued and allured, by Walter in a professionally curious sense. By the boy's mind. The way the boy worked and rationalized things was far beyond that of a mature adult. His acceptance was extraordinary. His stubbornness matched Will's and Hannibal's own. His problem solving skills were brilliant. He knew how to play the game to obtain exactly what he wanted or needed from a situation. Hannibal wanted to see the boy grow. He wanted to know if Walter harbored the same darkness that Will had deep inside of himself and if it would grow or be squandered out by the light. He was a remarkable enigma and it was selfish of Hannibal, but he wanted to have his hands there to impact exactly the outcome of the puzzle that was Walter Graham.

"I want my family," Hannibal finally decided.

Mischa's smile brightened as she placed the flower crown on her head and met Hannibal's gaze. "But we are a family, Hanni."

"Yes," Hannibal agreed. "Yes, we are a family." He bent over to pick up another block and put it in place with a deep breath. He had thought that the feeling of being watched would have disappeared with how long he had been working on the grounds, but the ghosts of the past just seemed to keep an eye on him.

Or maybe not a ghost. A shifting among the trees told Hannibal it was something else, but he didn't honestly feel that threatened by it. Maybe he should have and maybe hindsight would be twenty-

twenty, but for the time being there were more important things to focus on than some random person wandering through the forest on his family's property.

Monsters from his past were nothing but shadows now. He had become the monster in the night for all of them and for many more besides them. A stranger in the tree line was the least of Hannibal’s worries. The very least. Especially as a breeze kicked up.

Hannibal inhaled deeply of the scent of forest, overshadowed by petrichor, though there was not bound to be any rain any time soon. Mischa seemed to have caught it too, because she slowly rose to her feet, gazing into the trees while Hannibal returned to his work.

“What kind of father will you be, Hanni?” she asked, stepping a little closer to the forest, head tipped to the side curiously.

Hannibal blinked at the question that he had never truly considered or asked himself before. He had long ago pushed the idea of parenthood from his mind. He could manipulate relationships, but had never wanted to blind someone to the point where he could obtain a marital status. Until Will. But Will was different. He wasn’t blind and had agreed.

Marriage had been the first obstacle. Children hadn’t even been considered until Abigail, and even she was another piece in his chess game against fate. She was there for Will’s sake, to bind Will even further to Hannibal. Walter, on the other hand, had belonged to Will long before Hannibal had entered the picture. Walter was not a bargaining chip, he was something special. Something used against Hannibal instead of the other way around. Will had learned his lesson with Abigail as had Hannibal.

“The worst kind,” Hannibal finally replied, voice a bit more defeated than he wanted it to be. “Manipulative and cold. Cruel and overly analytical. I fear my standards will never be met and therefore my children will always doubt their self-worth.”

“That doesn’t sound like you,” Mischa giggled, turning her attention away from the trees in disinterest and running through the tall grass and over to the wheelbarrow that was nearing the end of its cement mixture. “You’re too kind to be mean.”

Hannibal winced at the words. What a pretty little lie that only a child could tell.

“You were the nicest big brother,” Mischa continued on, stepping up onto one of the granite stones with her arms outstretched for balance as she wavered on one foot. “You would read me stories and play tea parties with me. You helped me to not be frightened during lightning storms. And you always drew me such nice pictures.”

Hannibal scooped the last of the mixture from the wheelbarrow and added it to the wall before another granite block was applied. He did his best to ignore the compliments, compliments he did not in any way deserve. With the block in place, he turned back to the young girl with his hands on his hips.

“What did you want to play?” he questioned with a deep breath.

“Hide and seek!”

Hannibal nodded, biting back his dislike of the suggestion. Nothing good had come from hide and seek since that night. He could recall with absolute clarity what he had told Mischa as they hid behind a tree that first day.

"You need to be quiet," he whispered, his index finger going over his lips to further his point. Mischa's frightened blue eyes stared up at him and she nodded, her hand tightening its grip on his. She shivered in the snow drift, their footprints marking their path directly for them, though Hannibal hoped that the driving snow would be enough to shield them from the men closing in around them. There was a small whimper from the girl and Hannibal snatched her up in a hug against her chest. "Shh," he ordered gently. "It's alright. It's just a game."

"A game?" she asked into his coat.

"We're just going to play hide and seek, alright? We're both going to hide from those men. If we hide really well, they'll get bored and go away."

"It's cold, Hanni."

"I know." Hannibal pushed the girl back and tugged at his coat, pulling it from his small frame to drape it over her shoulders. He zipped it up and watched as she snuggled into it. Hannibal's fingers had long ago grown numb and the feeling was slowly spreading up into his hands. He gave her a gentle smile. "If we keep going that way, we'll reach the cabin. We'll be warm there for the night. In the morning we'll find the Volynsky home. They'll help."

"My feet hurt, Hanni."

"Shh..." Hannibal pressed his hand over her mouth and pulled her close once more at shouts from a few trees away. They were too close now. Far too close. Hannibal's eyes snapped shut and his nose scrunched up as he dared not to breathe, afraid that the vapor that caught the air would give them away. He waited, heart pounding in his ears for what felt like eons until the shouts from the men drifted away. "I'll carry you, alright?"

And he did. He lifted her up onto his back and trudged through the blinding snow in the direction of the hunting cabin that he had become far more familiar with than he had ever wanted to. His father had insisted on him learning to hunt and Hannibal spent a good chunk of his summers trapped in that humid, old, smelly building with animal carcasses littered about him.

She shivered against him, hands ironclad around his neck at an uncomfortable angle. His shoes were wet now. He could feel the sloshing of melted snow chilling his toes. Maybe they could start a fire. A small one wouldn't be too noticeable, would it? They very well couldn't stay huddled in a place without some warmth, even if they would be out of the wind the temperatures would be enough to freeze them.

Hannibal had to stop several more times, hiding them down creek banks and behind rocks as the voices would once more rise over the snow, causing Hannibal's heart to nearly burst from his chest each time.

The cabin was icy when he pushed inside of it. He set Mischa down and shut the door, grabbing a chair from the table to shove beneath the door handle. Once he was certain that was in place, he wandered around the cabin in near pitch blackness until he found the curtains to the windows. He pulled them shut, praying they were thick enough to block out any fire light.

"Hanni," Mischa whined through chattering teeth. She sniffled in the dark before there was a sob.

"Quiet, Mischa," Hannibal ordered, voice a bit harsher than he meant it. There was a louder cry and Hannibal felt a lump form in his own throat, though it was for reasons other than being cold. He raced towards the sounds and found his sister's body in the dark. He knelt down and hugged her tightly. "I'm sorry. It's alright. Everything is going to be alright. We're still playing though, so I need you to keep being quiet."

"How long do we have to play?"

"Until we reach the Volynskys. Can you do that for me? Please, Mischa!" She nodded and Hannibal let out a deep sigh. He released her and quickly made himself busy through the cabin. "I'll make a fire and get you warm. There should be some more blankets somewhere."

"I'm hungry."

Hannibal froze in his work and closed his eyes. There was possibly something here, but Hannibal doubted it. His father was always careful to not leave any food behind because it would attract unwanted animals or people that could damage the cabin.

"Let me get a fire going and then I'll see if I can find something to eat. Alright?"

There wasn't an answer, but there didn't need to be. Hannibal set to work again, finding some kindling and firewood in the corner and the matches in the kettle on the hearth. It took him a beat or two to finally get the wood to light without any form of starter, but soon enough there was a decent sized flame that would at least stave off the chill. Hannibal pushed Mischa in front of it, pulling her wet clothes from her body and laying them over the bricks of the hearth in order to help them dry.

He dragged the mattress from the only bed in the cabin and tugged it over to the fireplace, dropping it to the ground. He ripped the two blankets from the mattress before cocooning Mischa up in one of them, her teeth still chattering. He sat her as close to the fire as he could on the mattress and added another small piece of wood to it before looking back through the cabin for any kind of food. Coming up empty, Hannibal frowned and decided that he would always have a supply of something nonperishable somewhere in case he was ever in trouble again.

There were some tea packets though, which would be better than nothing. He grabbed the packets and then the kettle, heading over to the door to dig some of the fresh snow into the kettle, fingers trembling with the cold. He placed the kettle in the middle of the flames and there was a hiss that caused Mischa to jump, but to Hannibal's relief she was silent.

With two cups placed beside the hearth, Hannibal pulled off his wet shoes and socks and set them by the fire, then his clothes as well before tugging the last and thinnest blanket around his body in hopes that he would be warm. As soon as he was settled on the mattress, Mischa's body fell against his and he glanced down to watch her eye lashes flutter in the firelight.

"You can sleep," Hannibal offered in a whisper. "I'll wake you when the tea is ready."

"Hungry," her tired voice mewled.

"We'll find some food tomorrow. I promise."

Mischa nodded and it didn't take too long for her to drift off to sleep, leaving Hannibal alone with the bloodied images of his parent's murders. The storm had scared Mischa enough that Hannibal had taken her to their parents' room. The men had barged in a few hours later and Hannibal had dragged Mischa under the bed, telling her to plug her ears and close her eyes. But his had stayed open. Seen everything.

His father's head turned to a bloodied pulp as it was beaten in with a crucifix that was kept on the mantle in the main parlor. The screams of his mother begging before they were silenced, but not before her body was used in a way that Hannibal had never seen anyone's used before.

The kettle was steaming by the time Hannibal finally came to. He used the edge of the blanket to pull the metal from the flames and poured the water into two cups before adding a tea bag to each.

Mischa yawned and rubbed at her eyes, happily taking the warm cup into her frozen hands when Hannibal passed it to her. Hannibal pressed a kiss to her head and sighed, his breath hanging deadly in the stale cabin air.

"I don't want to play anymore Hanni," Mischa muttered, eyes stuck on the small flames that Hannibal reached out to stoke. "I want Mom and Dad."

Hannibal tugged playfully at the red ribbon in her hair. "I want you to drink all of that before you fall back to sleep, ok? It'll help warm you up."

"But I want-"

"Hush," Hannibal soothed once more, nuzzling her nose with his own and causing the girl to giggle softly. "Just trust me a little longer. Can you do that?" Mischa nodded and brought the tea to her lips, taking a tentative sip. "Thank you for being so good for me, Mischa. I promise I'll take care of you. Let's just play hide and seek a little bit longer."

"And where would you like to play?" Hannibal asked, lowering himself to his knees in the dirt to be the same height as his sister. She pointed out in the distance and Hannibal grimaced as he took in Castle Lecter, absolutely despising the way that his mind was forcing him back into that building. "In there?"

"Yes!" Mischa said happily with a bounce.

"Alright," Hannibal reluctantly said with a frown, his chest going immediately tight at the idea of stepping foot in that building.

Will watched curiously from the tree line at the man before him that was doing hard labor, a sight that Will never thought he would ever see the man perform. Dissecting a body was a different thing altogether, but watching Hannibal build something efficiently was an enlightening moment to be certain. Not that Hannibal couldn't accomplish the task of whatever it was that he was doing, but just the idea of Hannibal getting his hands dirty struck Will as out of the norm.

It also fit the man in a way that Will wished he could place. There was something about seeing the normally stuffy killer dressed down and covered in dust and dirt that brought a smile to Will's lips.

A smile he wished didn't linger on his lips as long as it did. He was still upset. Not even upset. Upset was putting it mildly.

Will's anger burned in his chest as if his very soul were aflame and ready to spontaneously combust. A dark room held deep inside of his head was developing images he wasn't sure he could ever forget. A man in suits brandishing a tongue laced with poison, setting up pins just to knock them down at his own convenience no matter the outcome to anyone else that just so happened to be in the way.

Images of a broken man that Will had told that whatever the man wanted to do, not to come back for him. That Will had bled far too much and could hardly breathe and one more ounce of fucked up love could end his life.

A frozen love that Will had tired for so long not to miss, a love that he overdosed from with just a single touch. A love that pulled at his bones with a longing ache. A love that had dragged him to a bed of coals that Will couldn't seem to regret. Not even when he had been left alone with the burning embers and had barely made it out alive.

The killer had never left Will's dreams, broken bones and empty shrieks, sleepless nights in burning sheets. Even phantom images had left Will desperate for him. Standing here now, close enough to hear an odd language on the wind, pleaded Will's body to move closer. His legs were sore with want, his heart racing in his chest like a speeding bullet. His hands throbbed with how tightly he held them in fists.

Maroon eyes darted up in his direction and Will hid the very small bit of his body that was exposed back behind the trunk of the tree. His eyes closed tightly and he held his breath despite the fact that he didn't need to. He waited for what felt like minutes for footsteps to come after him, but there was no such thing. Instead, the scraping of stones picked up again with Lithuanian dancing through the forest.

Will nearly laughed aloud. He was hiding from his own husband. He was hiding from a man that he had known for years upon years. A man that he had shared so many twisted experiences with that he could never survive being separated from him, and yet... there Will was, hidden behind a tree in the heart of Lithuania, mere feet away from the other piece of his soul, and he couldn't bring himself to move closer.

Will dared himself to slowly lean back around the tree to gain another look at the man who had left him. And Will honestly shouldn't have been all that upset over the matter. He had tried to end Hannibal's life with hands tight around the other man's throat. It had been long enough that Will didn't see any of the purple bruising across Hannibal's skin but that didn't stop the way that he wished it were still there, as sick as that was.

Like the scaring across the insides of Hannibal's wrists, Will wanted to be further marked into the man's skin. A sign that Will was always there. Especially since the ring on his finger was still missing. His finger still felt odd without Hannibal's own body to grace it. A large part of Will was missing and his chest clenched at it, had been in a constant knot after having searched the entirety of the Verger estate top to bottom to find the missing item and coming up empty. It wasn't fair how in his relapse he had lost the one piece of his life that he had hoped would always be with him, even if he did forget again.

Instead Will had lost nearly all of it. He had Walter, of course, and he would always love his son, but how long had his world revolved around Hannibal? Far too long for Will to be sane without the man in it.

The man finally came to a stop and turned his attention to the castle in the distance. The one that not even Will dared to enter the last time he was here. A place he wasn't sure he should enter now, if he would be permitted to.

Hannibal hesitated, something in his stance and his Lithuanian a bit uncertain. Will stood in curious silence, watching as Hannibal slowly made his way from whatever it was that he was building and stepped through the tall, brown grass and towards the castle.

It wasn't until Hannibal was a speck in the distance that Will let himself wander from behind the tree and through the forest into the clearing. A clearing full of multiple graves, each stone a bit more ornate than the last, some with names perfectly etched into the stone and others worn and weathered away by time and the elements.

Will stopped in front of the stone work that Hannibal had left behind, a hand reaching out to touch the last stone that had been put in place, at Will's eye level. The stone was a cold mattress that didn't have even the hint of a blanket or sheet over it just in case Will decided he wanted to hang himself. Though there were far more options at Will's disposal in that god forsaken cell than hanging. He had debated slamming his head into the sink multiple times when the faucet would repeatedly drip water in the basin despite how hard he forced the water off when he wasn't using it.

"You should have stayed there," a sharp voice said behind him and Will closed his eyes with a deep breath. He hadn't been able to make the voices go silent, not even with Hannibal's words running through his head.

Wade into the quiet of the stream. Let the voices be washed away by the current. Relax into the drag of the water. Feel the voices being pulled away from you. You're safe. Your mind is a safe place for you. You can pick and choose which voices you would like. It's your head.

It hadn't felt like his own head in a long time. Had it ever been his own head? He doubted it. His head had always belonged to everyone around him and he wished that he could silence all of the voices in his head that liked to voice his own sins and guilts back at him.

"You're angry," Will muttered, turning away from the stone, his eyes landing on Molly. Her arms were folded over her chest, head tipped to the side and tongue bit between her teeth and in her cheek as she liked to do when waiting for a *damn good explanation.* "I understand."

"I don't think you do Will," she shot back icily, though her voice didn't raise in volume. Her fingers tapped over her arm and her head tipped the opposite direction. "Why am I mad Will? Let's start there."

"You're dead," Will replied boredly with a halfhearted shrug. His insides twisted as he did his best not to let his own frustrations get the best of him. He just wished that sometimes she would leave his head, like Jack had left his head when dismissed. Jack had gone silent, why couldn't Molly?

There was a hurt snicker of disbelief from the woman and her hands were thrown to her sides as she looked around them, tongue pushing at the back of her teeth with a shake of her head. "Try again. You're better than that Will, and you know you are."

“Walter,” Will offered up in absolute certainty as he glanced around at the bags of cement mix that were waiting to be used, as well as more stones to be put in place for a tomb. Mischa’s, no doubt. She would be the only thing special enough to Hannibal to deserve such treatment even after a death that had occurred about three decades before. “He’s all you’ve ever cared about.”

“I just want him safe, Will,” Molly said with an exasperated sigh. “That is all I have ever wanted for my son.”

“And that’s not me.”

“Not now,” Molly agreed. “You’re dangerous and you are more than well aware of it. Aware of the way that Hannibal makes you feel, makes you act.”

Will paused in his step towards the wheelbarrow and looked up at Molly with a sharp glare. “He doesn’t make me do anything,” Will corrected. “He has never once made me-”

“He manipulates you!”

“I would stop him if I didn’t like it!” Will shouted back. The silent forest around him seemed to jump to life as birds flew from nearby trees and there was a rustle of something a bit bigger beyond the tree line, though Will didn’t give much thought to it. Molly’s eyes widened with Will’s own eyes as the realization finally sunk into him. He hadn’t liked all of it, not in the slightest. Being framed for murder, having his first and second child killed and his body gutted and cut open in all manners were absolutely not things that Will had enjoyed. But he had obviously not minded enough that he put up with it. Had gone through years upon years of abuse because.... He liked it.

“Masochist,” Molly grumbled, folding her arms over her chest. ‘You’re sick and I don’t want you around my son.”

“Who do you want to take care of your son, Molly?” Will shot back hotly, turning away from her to look back over the dirty, dusty wheelbarrow. His fingers reached out and dug through the slowly drying cement left on the inside of the wheelbarrow, the grittiness getting stuck under his fingernails, but he didn’t care. “Your sister would refuse, your parents are far too old and would ignore him on good days. I have no idea who the boy’s father was, you never mentioned any type of person to me and there’s no one listed on his birth certificate. He has no other family and to be honest, I doubt they care much at all. I haven’t heard about any sort of reward or search being put on by the family for him. You were buried and it’s like Wally fell off the face of the earth. What is it exactly that you were hoping for?”

“Let him stay with Margot and Alana. They’ll be good for him.”

“Absolutely not,” Will muttered lowly, wiping his fingers down his jeans to clean them. “As much as you hate it, I have legal rights over him. You knew this when you let me sign the adoption papers.”

“What are you possibly going to offer him that Margot and Alana can’t?”

“Love!” Will’s voice once more rose in frustration and he spun around to see Molly’s mouth dropped open in shock. “I love him like he was own kid, Molly. I always have. Have I ever once done a single thing to hurt him or upset him? Have I ever been unkind or unfair or upset with him? Have I ever yelled at him? Disciplined him too harshly? I’ve been good to him, Molly! I will keep being good to him.”

"No you won't," she whispered with a shake of her head, moving towards Will to take his shoulder in her grip. It felt heavy, an anchor to drag Will back into the depth of his mind when all he wanted to do was escape. "You'll turn him into something horrible, a monster like you and Hannibal."

"I won't," Will argued, though he could hear his own lie in his words. "He won't become like either of us."

"You think that Hannibal will just stop? Do you honestly believe that if you walked up into that castle right now and asked him to never kill again, that he would stop? Just for little, old you? Will, this isn't some romance movie where the man changes for the person he loves. People don't just change."

"He would."

Will's eyes left Molly's and turned to the castle that was starting to catch the lower light of the afternoon, a coldness slowly starting to permeate the air. There had been plenty of things in Will's life that he had been uncertain about and there were bound to be more, but he knew for a fact that if he asked, Hannibal would give it to him. It wouldn't even be an issue up for discussion. Hannibal would stop. But... was that something that Will wanted?

This is all I ever wanted for you, Will. For both of us.

It's beautiful.

Will's eyes slid shut as he thought over those moments. Those precious moments that he had been trying so hard to destroy for so long. Moments that he would never fight ever again. They wouldn't drag him down in the Atlantic ever again. They had happened, they were there, and that was where they would stay. Right where Will could cherish them.

"Don't be ignorant," Molly scolded. "Stop painting him in a better light."

"I'm not," Will whispered, mind racing back over the fresh memories that were still sharp in his head. Over a specific conversation he had had with Hannibal not too long ago. A conversation that had solidified everything in Will's heart.

"And you really mean to include Walter in this life you've thought up?" Will asked, pulling his bottom lip into his teeth when the words left him.

"I figured you were packaged together from the moment you wouldn't run away with me," Hannibal answered, bringing Will's hand to his mouth so he could kiss at his knuckles. "The boy will stay with us. I will take care of him."

"He's not your son," Will pointed out, keeping his eyes tightly on the pillow in his hand. "You don't have to-"

"I promise to take care of him. Of both of you."

"You promise?" he asked.

"I promise," Hannibal whispered. "Someplace safe where he can grow up, the best schooling we can find for him. He will want for nothing. The answer is always yes for you Will. Forever, yes."

“Molly, we’re going to take your son somewhere safe where he can grow up with the best schooling available for him. Your son will want for nothing,” Will promised, eyes flickering open to look over the woman who still looked apprehensive. “He will never be forced to do anything. He will never be ashamed of his choices. He will be successful and happy. He will have a loving family. He will have everything you’ve always wanted for him.” Will pulled Molly’s hand from his shoulder and brought it to his lips, pressing a kiss into her knuckles. “Walter will have a full life. You can rest knowing that he will always come first and that I will always be there to protect him. I will always be there for him.”

“You promise Will? You promise me right now.”

“I promise. And I always keep my promises."

Chapter 44

Chapter Summary

> Observing had always been something that Will had been good at. Seeing and feeling things that others didn't notice. But in that moment, like so many lately, Will wished he couldn't do either of those things.

Chapter Notes

> My beta and I hope that Wanda will get well soon. Thank you for always reading and commenting on all the chapters. Both of us are sending you big hugs and warm thoughts. This chapter is dedicated to Wanda Maximoff. I hope you enjoy this chapter and come back for the sequel. You make writing a joy with all of you kind words. Much love from one of us in the US and the other in Mexico.

Losing You
Terrifies Me

“What are we waiting for?” Walter questioned that morning at the breakfast table.

Morgan was busy, consumed up in a book that Margot had let him read ever since the announcement of the move had come about as if it would make the transition any easier on the child. Margot shot a glance at Walter from where she was eating a small bowl of fruit.

“Waiting for?” Alana questioned nonchalantly, not looking up from her tablet as she sipped on her morning coffee.

“Why aren’t we leaving?” Walter pressed, his voice down low as if the walls would be able to hear the conversation. He pushed his plate of food aside and sat up a little higher in his chair. “What are we waiting for?”

Alana’s brows rose at the question, and she licked her lips with a small nod, her hands folding on the table top as her tablet was set aside. “We are currently waiting for your passport to be delivered to us. It takes time to get paperwork processed. And processed under the table.”

“Passport?” Walter questioned. “We’re leaving the country then?”

Morgan perked up a bit at that, his eyes leaving his book to glance around at the conversation curiously. “Where?” he asked in a voice mimicking the volume of Walter’s.

“Margot and I are still deciding. We’re planning on leaving for a safe house we’re securing by the end of this week,” Alana continued on, her tone just as simple and unconcerned as it had been from the beginning of time. “We had to make some changes to the plans when you were unable to tell us who had said all of those things. We will be leaving Friday night.”

“Where?” Morgan asked again, looking over to Margot who was still silent, but had set her fork aside.

“Maybe South America or Europe,” Margot answered. “Just for a bit. Then somewhere else.”

“We’re waiting until Friday? We don’t have to have a passport to go to a hotel or something,” Walter argued, eyes darting worriedly between the two adults. They had been sitting on this for a week already. Another four days wasn’t good enough. Walter hadn’t heard those men speaking again, but he knew when adults were serious and when they weren’t. He knew all too well from his mother’s boyfriends the types of inflections that tones could have and when to listen and when not to listen. “We should have been out of this house the night that I told you about....” Walter trailed off, but he knew that Margot and Alana understood.

“Wally,” Margot said in her calm and toneless voice, a micro smile on her red lips. “Alana and I have decided that it’s best for all of us if we wait until the end of this week.”

“Why?” Walter’s brows furrowed in confusion; his appetite completely gone now. “Because it would be suspicious if we just left?”

“That is one of the reasons, yes,” Alana agreed with a nod, picking up her tablet once more to signal the end of the discussion. “Among other things that you wouldn’t understand.”

“My dad would have listened,” Walter grumbled, pushing his chair back from the table and leaving the room without being excused. If they were going to ignore him then he didn’t need to follow their rules.

He went back to his room, heading directly for the closet where his bag was still packed from that day where he had decided to run away before he was stopped. He could do it now. He pulled the bag, the only thing in the entire closet, from the floor and tossed it over his shoulder. His dad had taught him enough on how to get by for a bit out on his own. And he knew where Margot and Alana kept an extra bit of emergency cash in one of the drawers in the study. He had been boredly rummaging through the desk one day and stumbled upon it.

It would be tough, but he had been in worse conditions before with his mom and if she had been able to pull them through it, then he could do it alone. He was sure. With Molly and Will’s lessons and stubbornness in himself, he was certain he would be fine.

Spring was finally starting to come around too. The nights would still be chilly, but with one of the large coats in the hall closet, a heavy blanket from his bed, and a box of matches he had also found, he could stay warm. Water would be a different issue, but he could go into a convenient store and buy some if he needed it.

“You’re leaving, aren’t you Wally?” a small voice asked behind him, causing Walter to whip around at breakneck speed. Morgan's eyes drifted over Walter curiously and Walter had to glance down at his hands to find that he had unconsciously started to rip the bedspread from his bed to fold up and take with him.

Walter inhaled deeply, looking around the room at anything that wasn't the child. Morgan wouldn't understand. He was just a kid. An annoyance that Walter had put up with for far longer than he thought he would have to and he had just about enough of it. He was tired of trusting all of the adults in his life. He was tired of believing that they all wanted what was best for him, because it was utterly clear that they didn't.

If they had, then his mom wouldn't have dated such assholes as often as she did. She wouldn't have let them be abused and live on dry toast and bland rice when they had a working stove. She wouldn't have let any of those men touch him...

If they had, his aunt and grandparents would like him. They wouldn't look at him like he was lower than the dust on their shoes. Just because he was a bastard kid who didn't know who his biological father was didn't mean he was any less of a person.

If they had, Will wouldn't have left him. Will would have stayed, would have picked him over Hannibal. Will wouldn't have let any of those awful killers anywhere near his mom or him, then his mother would still be alive.

If they had, then they wouldn't still be sitting around this house while those men were planning whatever horrible things they were planning. They would have left by now. They would already be safe.

If they had at all, once in time, wanted what was best for Walter, then... He couldn't leave. Because it would just put Morgan in the same exact position. He wasn't sure how he knew, but he did. Just in the same way that he knew that if they waited until this Friday then something horrible was bound to happen. It was going to happen, no ifs, ands, or buts.

Morgan didn't deserve that. Walter didn't know if he could do anything, if there was anything for him to do, that would help the boy, but he had an overwhelming feeling that he needed to try. Maybe if the grownups couldn't step up then he had the responsibility to.

"No," he assured, dropping the blanket to the floor before taking the back pack back to the closet and closing the closet door. "I'm not leaving."

"Oh good. You said we were going to teach Applesauce another trick today."

Walter nodded. "I sure did, didn't I kid?"

Morgan hummed with a nod and a giant smile.

"Maybe he's right," Margot said, picking up the book that had been haphazardly tossed aside as Morgan had raced after the retreating Walter. "It wouldn't be difficult for us to find a hotel for the rest of this week. We could afford it."

"It's not about the money," Alana muttered. "You know that we agreed to give Will until Friday."

"He would be able to figure it out, I'm sure. You've met him, haven't you?"

Alana let out a sighed laugh and shook her head with a smile at her wife. "Unfortunately," she answered.

"We wouldn't have met without him, so don't start with that *unfortunately* stuff." Margot waved off Alana. "I'm certain he would be able to find us."

"He said he would-"

"I think he would understand."

Alana sighed, rubbing at her tired eyes, ignoring the fact that she probably smeared her makeup in the process. "I don't want to tempt fate."

"We're tempting fate while staying here," Margot pointed out as she reached for her fork to pick up a slice of strawberry and bring it to her lips.

"Would you rather fight a farm hand or two killers?"

"Two killers. At least we know what to expect from them."

Alana groaned and laid her head on the table with a small thump. There was a light chuckle from Margot, but Alana didn't look up. "Maybe you're right," she mumbled.

"Of course I'm right," Margot agreed without hesitation, though the words weren't harsh in the slightest. "Walter is a boy who grew up like I did. He's always had to be on his toes, always walking on eggshells, always ready to run or fight. He's cautious and can pick up on small things that others can't."

"How on earth could you possibly know that?" Alana asked, her voice echoing back at her from the wood of the table.

"You can see it in his eyes," Margot explained gently. "The same hallowed, scared look that I used to see in mine while Mason was alive."

"Where do you think we'll go?" Morgan asked as he fished another treat from the container in his hands that Applesauce was trying to shove her nose into. Morgan laughed and pushed the dog away.

Walter snatched hold of her collar and tugged on the dog until it took a step or two back. "The point of the treats is to give it to her when she does the trick," Walter teased with a light smile.

"She's bigger than me!" Morgan shot back with another laugh. "Where do you think we'll go?"

"I don't know," Walter replied with a shrug. "Why does it matter where we go?"

"I want to see Paris." Morgan put the lid on the treats and Walter released the dog who raced forward and knocked the container from Morgan's hands to try to get in it. Morgan giggled and stepped back to watch Applesauce play.

Walter sighed, both of them having given up on trying to get Applesauce to learn anything new. Instead, Walter lowered himself to the ground and played with the fraying end of his shoelace. "Why there?" he grumbled.

“I saw a picture once in a market place.” Morgan gave a shrug, his smile warm as he ruffled Applesauce’s ears. “I was shopping with my mother and there was a stand with a bunch of small pictures. There were things like the Eiffel Tower and stuff, but the one that caught my eye was the Palais Garnier.”

“The what?” Walter glanced up from his shoelace at the boy who had said the words without a hint of issue, something like from a movie. Beautiful and flowing.

“The Palais Garnier?” Morgan questioned, turning his head enough to look at Walter before his attention was once again given to Applesauce. “It’s an opera house there.”

“Out of everything there is to see there and you want to see an opera house?”

Morgan gave another small shrug. “What’s wrong with opera?”

“It’s boring? Christ kid!” Walter groaned, hiding his face in his knees. “There’s better music out there.”

“I think that it’s a bit harder to write opera than it is to write whatever is on the radio. They have to write music for each of the instruments in the orchestra. Each part is different. Isn’t that interesting?” Morgan questioned. “Or that’s what my mom said at least. Each instrument has something different to play and it all comes together to make something beautiful.”

Walter was quiet as he took in the explanation. He had never thought of music in such a way. Normally music was just something he would turn on loudly to drown out the arguments that his mother and whoever she was with would have. Something with a strong beat that could hide the fists pounding on counters, the smashing of plates, the breaking of chairs thrown against walls, the sound of a backhanded slap that Walter had to pretend didn’t leave purple lace under his mother’s eye.

Music was a band aid to cover the hurt. It was a blanket meant to distract from the cold, not be enjoyed. But.... Everyone else always seemed to enjoy music. Even Will had enjoyed music, though it was horrible old country or classic rock most of the time. The classic rock wasn’t bad, Walter supposed. Maybe classical music wouldn’t be all that bad. He had always wanted to learn the piano. Maybe now that his parents would have money he could take lessons?

Could he ask that of them? They needed to be settled first before Walter even dared to ask for a single thing. Maybe he shouldn’t even ask them. Maybe that would be a step too far. Anything could be a step too far and Walter was suddenly overwhelmed by the prospect.

“Wally? Are you ok?”

Walter cleared his throat and shook his head, plastering a smile over his lips. “Fine,” he lied. “Maybe we should head inside. It’s almost time for your lessons to start, isn’t it?”

“Do you want to come to my lesson with me?” Morgan asked excitedly, heading over to where Applesauce had knocked the treat container to pick it up.

“I can’t understand anything you are learning. It’s all in German. God help me if I ever have to learn German,” Walter teased lightly.

“And if Will doesn’t come back?” Alana asked with a sigh, pacing the dining room, her heels clicking on the ground with each step, sending a metronome-like tone in the room.

“Will will come back,” Margot defended boredly, getting up from where she was sitting. She came around the table and got in front of Alana who halted, blue eyes darting up to meet Margot’s. “What makes you think he won’t? He came back for Wally the first time.”

“And immediately left. You know how flighty he can be when it comes to Hannibal.”

Alana folded her arms around her chest in an almost protective manner like she used to when Margot had first met the woman who had been shoved through a window. Possibly phantom pain, but Margot had never pushed her wife for an explanation. There were just secrets the two of them had and respected the boundary of and whatever had happened in that kitchen in the middle of that rain storm was a line that Margot wouldn’t cross.

Margot’s hand caressed over Alana’s cheek, brushing Alana’s dark hair behind her cheek. “What if Will doesn’t come back?” Margot mused simply for Alana’s sake. It was better to dig through all possibilities than to try to ignore the situation, Margot had found. The therapist in Alana wouldn’t let anything rest until she had all of the possible answers and outcomes. “What do we do then?”

“We take in the boy, don’t we? His family won’t take him as far as he’s explained.” Alana leaned into Margot’s hand and let her eyes slide close. “And we’ve been wanting another.”

“And that another is Walter Graham?” Margot gave a light and airy breath of laughter. “He’s not exactly what I pictured in our next child.”

“He’s a good kid underneath it all,” Alana stated firmly as if Margot didn’t already know that. He was a difficult child, but with the amount of trauma he had faced and was still facing, Margot was certain that it would take quite a bit more to knock down the door to him, but once it was opened there would be endless possibilities. “He’s smart. He could join Morgan in his lessons.”

“I think that maybe Walter would prefer public school a bit more than being homeschooled. I doubt that locking him down in the house would do him any favors.” Margot leaned closer and placed a gentle kiss to Alana’s mouth before stepping back with a kind smile. “Maybe Morgan would enjoy a more public setting as well.”

“Morgan?” Alana shook her head. “You said yourself that you wanted him to be homeschooled so that he would learn everything he would need to take over the-”

“If we leave the country there’s not going to be much of a family business to take over,” Margot pointed out kindly, reaching out across the table to fetch her half gone mimosa and take a sip from the glass. “You’ve seen how tightly he’s clung to Walter. He needs more friends, he needs to be more social. He needs something more normal than what we’re giving him.”

“Just because you and your brother were homeschooled doesn't mean that he is going to turn out like Mason.”

Margot stiffened at the words, the fear that had long been between the two of them finally voiced after four years of silence. She lowered her glass to the table with narrowed eyes that blurred the white lace over the table cloth to a blizzard instead of delicate snow fall.

"He's not Mason," Alana continued on softly, her hand taking Margot's shoulder with a reassuring squeeze. "He is nothing like Mason, Margot."

"Let's set that aside," Margot muttered out in a harsher voice than she meant it, but Alana didn't take any ill will from the words. She simply wrapped her arms around Margot and rested her chin on Margot's shoulder. It was a difficult topic and Alana had done no favors with shoving it so harshly into the spotlight. It could return to the dark for the time being until they were in a more stable place to speak about it. "I believe that would be better for us to blend in. I hardly believe that anyone would think that either of us wouldn't let the kids into a public school. Besides, if we give a piece of normality to Walter it could make it easier for him to open up to us and I know that you really want to help him."

"We both want to help him," Alana agreed in a whisper, pressing a kiss to the side of Margot's throat. Her grip around Margot tightened momentarily before she released Margot and stepped back. "I'm going to get Morgan ready for his lesson. I love you."

"Love you too," Margot muttered, snatching back up her glass and finishing it off.

"Hanni, please!" Mischa begged from just inside the front door, looking so utterly small compared to the large stone hallway. Hannibal stayed on the other side of the doorway, staring into the fortress that had been made to protect those who lived inside and a bitter taste filled his mouth at the idea that it had failed to fulfill the purpose of its existence. "Come on. Don't you want to see your room? It looks the same."

No. Hannibal didn't want to see his room. The room would have been left lonely behind such a rocky exterior. A room of a scared little boy who had twisted his own reality for so long after having almost made it to heaven himself.

His own paranoia had filled his world with weapons, each as deadly as the last sin he had inflicted on those he found below him, but maybe.... He could see why he would need to live in a building such as this. Grand and empty, dank with small windows and surrounded with his own filth. It was just perfect. Made just for him.

"Why are you fighting it so hard?" Mischa asked, stepping closer to him and taking his hand to try to pull him inside of the entrance. "There's nothing to hurt you here anymore."

"I don't know if I fully believe that, Mischa," Hannibal muttered. She was right though. He had pushed this off for far longer than he should have and he had to face it now. He had tried yesterday but no matter how desperately he pushed himself, he had stayed standing outside the castle nearly all night until the cold bit a bit too harshly at his toes, fingers and nose. He had retreated to Chiyoh's quarters by a warm fire, wondering how Will was fairing.

Hannibal hadn't been one hundred percent, but was sure he had seen Will in the tree line of the forest. Or at the very least had seen something that looked and smelled rather similar to the man hidden among the forest. He had tried to not get his hopes up that the man had come for him, but he couldn't exactly stop the fantasy from playing in his mind that Will would show up and help him finish Mischa's tomb and everything would be alright.

"I'm scared to go in," Hannibal admitted to the child who stopped tugging at his hand and tipped her head to the side with a confused look. "I suppose you wouldn't understand, would you?"

“Not really. There was only one bad thing that happened here,” Mischa explained, words simple in only a way a child could make them. “I don’t think the one bad thing should ruin all the good.”

Hannibal nearly wanted to smile, but the ache in his lungs held him back. The ache only grew stronger as he took his first step past the threshold as if the castle were trying to steal the air from his lungs to help itself return to life after so many years of being abandoned.

Hannibal found himself more surprised at how many of his family’s treasures were untouched. How much wealth was still left behind in this building for anyone who wanted it to come take it. Priceless art that was now dusty and a little sun bleached.

Hannibal had thought that most of it would have been gone by now, but maybe there were rumors around the nearest towns of exactly what had happened. Or perhaps there were greatly exaggerated tales of monsters that ate up men whole and if anyone came near the castle then the monster would get them too. Munch-munch, chomp-chomp, gobble-gobble, gulp.

Once the orphanage was moved away and this place was again abandoned.... Not even the people who operated the orphanage wanted to take the items away? Hannibal inhaled deeply as a phantom conversation pressed into his mind. One foggy and hazed over by wanting to forget it. A conversation between two little boys who said that everything in the castle was cursed and if someone were to take anything then they would die a horrible death of being eaten alive.

Hannibal hadn’t understood what that had meant then. Ha blocked absolutely everything out, even Mischa, until his uncle had come to rescue him. And it all came back at once while eating dinner one night. Hannibal bit his lip hard enough to make it bleed and then it slammed into him. Sent him into a silent frenzy and panic that only his aunt had noticed.

Mischa guided him through the halls, all eerily familiar, blurred like a dream he were trying to hold to. His chest continued to ache as he was pulled to the half of the estate that his family had resided in, the half that had been closed down and never entered when the orphanage had been set up. Ropes had been tied up to the iron work that held the tapestries on the walls, but they were easy enough to walk under, smelling musty with age, ready to snap with how brittle they had become with time.

Up a flight of stairs and down a carpeted hall that let up poof of dust with every single one of Hannibal’s steps, though Mischa’s made no markings whatsoever. Mischa stopped and Hannibal faced a door that had been hastily flung open by a young girl afraid of a thunderstorm. He heard the echo of the door hitting the stone wall as if the sound were just created.

It made his teeth clench with dislike and he shook his head to excuse the noise from his person, stepping past two young children who had left the room in search of their parents for better protection from nature.

The four poster bed had the curtain drawn back and half on the bed and half on the floor were the sheets and bedspread that had gotten caught on Hannibal’s ankle when he had left his bed. The pillow still held the indent of where his head had once upon a time laid.

Across the dresser was a folded stack of clothes. Something on the nicer side that his mother had picked out for him for a family portrait that was going to be commissioned the next day. Though why they couldn’t have taken a picture with a camera and given it to the artist, Hannibal would never know, though he recalled his mother enjoying the idea of experiencing and owning *the real thing.*

Hannibal's head tipped to the side at how small the clothing was. A good pair of dress pants, a button up shirt and a tie, not that he wore much else when he had to attend private tutoring and look his absolute best. A pair of dust, but still polished dress shoes. Beside those was a copy of *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*. An American neighbor had let him borrow it to help with his English.

I wish I could have adventures like this, he had thought as he had set the book aside that night. The adventures that he ended up getting weren't quite as fantastical as living in an art museum, though he had attempted that in Italy once upon a time. He had never been allowed to sleep in the museum, but living amongst the art after hours had its perks. Just as Will could hear stories in the bones of the dead, Hannibal could hear tales from paint brushes and chisels and hammers.

Hannibal inhaled deeply, the air stale, but his lungs felt a touch lighter. It wasn't quite so hard to breathe now. Maybe Mischa had been right. Maybe the bad didn't have to outweigh the good.

He couldn't bring himself to touch though. He didn't dare lift his hand to move a single item. All of his toys, including a handmade rocking chair from his father, stayed piled in a corner, a bit more messy than how Hannibal had liked his things because Mischa had been playing with them before she was led away to her room for bed by their mother.

"Can we see my room next?" Mischa asked, a hint of boredom in her voice most likely from how long Hannibal was taking to look at everything.

"Yes, Mischa," Hannibal answered weakly, his mouth so extremely dry. He stepped a bit further back to take in the entirety of the room, forgotten and lost to a single moment that was now trapped within the walls.

Hannibal turned his back to the room and made his way further up the hallway, leaning against the doorway of Mischa's room, unsure if he could find the strength in himself to actually step into it.

Just as his room was, her door was left ajar just enough for him to peer in. Her once bright yellow bedspread was nearly a light grey now, tossed about by a nightmare. A fox stuffed animal with two different sized button eyes lay slumped on the floor, having fallen from the bed. Hannibal adjusted himself enough to glance at a different angle where a large doll house, also handmade by his father, waited for a child to play with it once more. Beside the lovely house was a table with a tea set, covered with enough dust that the roses across the china weren't present any longer.

"I miss Socks," Mischa sighed. "He was a good fox."

"Yes," Hannibal agreed, voice barely above a whisper. "A good fox. He protected you from many things."

"Like you, Hanni!" Mischa explained, her grin bright as it was shot in his direction. "Come on." She turned on her heel and bounded up the hallway, her blonde hair bouncing with steps.

Hannibal's body was sluggish as he turned from his sister's room and followed her up the hall. Despite how much easier it was growing to breathe, his steps did not become any easier the closer he grew to the door at the end of the hallway. Past the second floor library and his mother's private sewing room. Past a grandfather clock, the pendulum had long since gone still and the chimes silent.

10:19

What an interesting time to stop. It made Hannibal curious as to the day. What had he been possibly doing when this clock finally stopped working? When was the last time that the Westminster Chimes played out in the stone hall? When was the last time his father had wound the clock?

The door he stopped in front of was, oddly enough, closed. His head tipped to the side as he looked over the dark wood and his hand reached out, caressing over the rough, handmade iron door knob.

It sent a spark of pain up his arm and through the entirety of his body. Not a physical pain in the slightest. Something much deeper than that, though he couldn't put a name to it. His heart skipped in his chest as he twisted the door handle and pushed the door open.

The hinges squeaked with age, a sound far louder now than when he had been a child. His breath caught as he willed his feet to move forward, readying himself for any skeletons that might have been waiting there for him, literal or metaphorical. Instead of bones, he was greeted with a carpet stained with old blood, as if no one had cared to try to clean it.

Hannibal winced at the brutality of the way his father's head had been bashed in with a religious relic. He could hear the thump of his father's body and recalled the way his eyes had widened of their own accord. The way that his hands moved to cover Mischa's mouth and hold her against him so that she couldn't see. How he instructed her to plug her ears in a rushed whisper.

And then his mother's voice was a shriek in his ears. Her body bent over the writing desk, her night slip roughly dragged up her legs as she fought. Their laughter was almost worse than her sobs and begs in whatever language she could speak in to hopefully help herself. Worse above that were the grunts and groans from the man. Sounds that would never leave Hannibal and that would haunt him the first few times he tried to participate in anything even remotely intimate.

Over the years Hannibal had grown numb to the gurgling that came from slitting a person's throat, but his mother's rang through his head as clear as a bell and it brought tears to his eyes and a lump to his throat. His precious schemes of restrained elegance were all of a sudden empty, useless, non-existent as he watched his young self force a sobbing Mischa out from under the bed as the men were distracted with raiding the room.

Portraits were slashed and his mother's jewelry box smashed on the floor and all the precious things from it were missing. His father's antique gun and knife collection had been pillaged through, the unwanted items left behind and scattered across the carpet and through the blood.

Hannibal stepped closer to the mess, falling down to his knees at the edge of the carpet. His hand stretched out and hovered over one of the ornamental knives that used to decorate the wall, but his boldness stopped there.

He wasn't meant to touch. He wasn't meant to move. This space was meant to stay exactly as it was. There was nothing that should disturb this space ever again. It had been left untouched for the last three decades and that was how it would stay. There was an aura or respect and reverence in the idea.

Hannibal had moved on long ago. Not accepted fully, but had moved past this and he didn't need any family heirlooms to pass down. Especially since there wasn't anyone to pass them down to and Hannibal didn't know any of the stories behind any of the items. He had never had a chance to ask his father about any of them, so there really wasn't a point. Everything had its home, its own little spot and it was not Hannibal's job to disrupt it.

Hannibal inhaled deeply, the scent of petrichor and ozone strong over the stale dustiness of the air. A small smile pulled at Hannibal’s lips and his heart ached at the thought that maybe he could share this with a curly haired man, but that man wouldn’t dare step out of the shadows. Not now. Hannibal wasn’t sure what it would take for Will to finally produce himself, but this moment wasn’t the right time. Hannibal was grateful for the fact as well. This was an intimate moment that he needed to deal with alone, but even the thought of Will’s presence was comforting.

Hannibal pushed himself up from his knees and glanced around at the room once more, taking it all in for the last time and turned to leave. Alone, he left the castle and returned to Chiyoh’s quarters as the sun was beginning to set.

The scent of rain and lightning did not abandon him as he washed up and prepared something small and not at all impressive for dinner. A fire crackled to keep him warm and he retired to bed, ready to begin his work again the next morning. Ready to finish the tomb and finally put Mischa to rest. Give her exactly what she had deserved and where she would be happy.

After that Hannibal wasn’t quite sure what he would do. For the longest time in his life he always had a direction, some form of a compass, but Will had been that compass for so long that Hannibal had lost a north that wasn’t the man.

He had infinite resources. He had made sure of it when he had run from Paris. It was just trying to decide which resource he should use and where it would leave him. How far would it take him from Will and when would Will finally give up. on him?

Hannibal’s hand moved over to his other hand as he rested into bed, finger gently caressing the ring that he had given to Will, curious if the man knew it was missing or if Will had simply come after him to once more try to kill him. If maybe Will were waiting for an opportune moment. If he were it would have been right then.

Observing had always been something that Will had been good at. Seeing and feeling things that others didn't notice. But in that moment, like so many lately, Will wished he couldn't do either of those things.

Watching Hannibal reminisce in his room was painful, but seeing the way the man stepped through his sister's room was down right excruciating. His parent’s room had been darker than Will thought it would be and it reminded Will just how little he actually knew about what had happened.

Will knew crime scenes well enough to know what the large stain was in the carpet of the master bedroom. He knew what the scattered belongings meant. He knew exactly what the scratch marks in the desk meant. It was disgusting. Horrible. Unbearable.

Will did his best to let the man be but when Hannibal dropped to his knees with tears rolling down his cheeks, Will nearly stepped out from behind the wall in the hallway he had been hiding behind. He wanted to comfort the man, remind him that he wasn’t alone, but Will wasn’t sure if he could quell the rage that was building up in him enough to actually be gentle with the hurt man.

It was best if he stayed out of the way, simply observed. If he kept his distance he could allow Hannibal the time to heal. The time to do exactly what he needed to do. Hannibal had obviously come here for a reason. He had needed closure of some sort and Will didn’t want to deny the man it.

Will wandered from Chiyoh's abandoned lodging and through the woods until he came to his small makeshift camp. Sure there were infinite places that Will could have stayed on the grounds. The cabin, the castle, even warmed beside Hannibal in that bed, but they all felt out of place. He didn't belong there. Not yet. Possibly not ever.

So he sat at the mouth of his tent and started a small enough fire to warm a can of food that he had brought. He pulled on his coat to keep out the chill of the night and made sure that the flames crackled away to help stay warm. The moment the sun fell, a frozenness filled the air and Will's breath hung in the sky, but the can of food kept his fingers and insides warm. It wasn't any different from any other camping trip he had been on. He had been camping in blizzards. A little frost on the tent wouldn't bother him.

What did bother him were the multiple bodies that he could hear out amongst the trees. They didn't belong to any animals as far as Will knew. Animals didn't move in the way that these creatures were moving. They didn't hide away like these creatures did. They didn't stake out Hannibal as he continued to build and nearly finish a beautifully made tomb for his sister. Animals didn't act like Will.

Will wasn't exactly sure what these men wanted and he didn't want to stick around to find out, but he wasn't about to leave. Not without his husband in tow back to America to find Walter and then to wherever the wind might take them. He hadn't been lying about wanting a family with Hannibal and about how he wasn't about to let Hannibal jeopardize it for them.

Will didn't sleep much that night. The chill of the air and the restlessness of the forest kept him awake and stoking the small fire. The sunrise brought with it chirping birds to welcome in the Wednesday morning and as Will warmed up some water to make some tea to warm his fingers, he could hear the familiar scraping of mixing concrete and the clinks of stones being put into place.

Will had enjoyed watching Hannibal get his hands dirty and was nearly certain that today would be the last day of Hannibal's project. The roof was what needed to be finished and the frame had already been built up to support it. It would dry overnight and then tomorrow Mischa could be put to rest.

Will had been trying to place exactly where Hannibal would be going once his sister was finally at peace, but he hadn't been able to figure it out. He had always assumed, that while not on the same page, that he and Hannibal had been in the same book, but now it was difficult to tell.

Will let the tea warm his body and he put out the fire before making his way back down to his spot to watch the cannibal work. Like so many days prior, Will simply watched as Hannibal carried on in simple conversations with an invisible person, the same types of persons that were still trying to obtain Will's attention.

The midday was decently warm enough for Will to need to shed his coat and he turned away from the tomb and made his way back to his camp, adding the coat to his things. He sat once more at the entrance of his tent and found another can of something that he could eat for lunch.

"You keep ignoring me," a voice teased. "Is a can of Dinty Moore really that much more important than me?" Will nearly snorted his laughter into the can and coughed, choking on a carrot. "Do you not remember how pathetic we all thought it was when that guy was found murdered in his hotel room and the last meal he ate was a cold can of that shit?"

“I remember,” Will acknowledged with a nod, using the back of his hand to wipe at his chin. He set the can and spoon aside and looked over the fiber analysis who stood in her usual dark jeans and red leather jacket. Her arms were folded over her chest and her hip was jutted out to the side, her teasing and crooked smile bright on her face. “How low I’ve stooped.”

“I don’t think canned meat is that low of a stoop compared to other parts of your life.”

“Ouch.” Will gave a fake gasp, a hand going to his chest as he smiled up at the woman. “That’s a bit harsh Bev, don’t you think?”

“Not really, no.” Beverly lowered herself to the forest floor, cross legged in the dirt. She made herself busy with playing with the pine needles that scattered the ground. With a deep breath she glanced up at Will through her curtain of hair. “I’m only saying it because it’s what you believe. I’m not real, remember?”

“I remember,” Will repeated with the same nod as earlier. “How could I forget?”

“You seem to like forgetting as of late.”

Will inhaled deeply, rubbing at his chin. “I suppose I did,” he admitted softly. “I don’t think I consciously chose to forget, I just couldn’t-”

“Live with the idea that you were like him,” Beverly offered simply, her smile still brilliantly bright.

“I don’t know,” Will chuckled with a shake of his head, reaching out for his food once more to take another bite. “I’ve always been like him. Ever since I was a child I was like him. I just saw how horrible my dad was and never wanted to be like him. I fought so hard for so long, I guess my mind couldn’t process both sides. It couldn’t justify both feelings.”

“Of wanting to be a good man while being a killer,” Beverly supplied lightly, tipping her head to the side while looking over him. Will gave a nod around another bite. “Will, you’re still a good man.”

Will snorted sarcastically and swallowed thickly. “I can’t lie to myself anymore. If I do then I’ll just keep repeating the same cycle that got me into this mess. I’m not a good man, Bev.”

“I think the two can coexist,” Beverly pushed, her knee nudging into Will’s. “I might not agree with both of them, but you can still be a good father to your kid. So hurry up here and get back home to him.”

“I don’t want to interrupt him.” Will glanced over his shoulder in the direction of where Hannibal would be, though he couldn’t see or hear the man anymore from the distance. “He gave me my space to take care of my son, he deserves the same respect for his sister.”

“And once he’s done, where are you going?”

“We’ll both go back for Walter and we’ll work things out as we go.” Will shrugged, the empty can now being set aside. “I’m not sure how else to navigate things. We’ll just have to play it by ear.”

“And if Walter doesn’t want to leave?”

Will's mouth went dry with the underlying fear that had been digging at his chest coming to light far quicker than he was ready to deal with it. "We can't stay there," Will muttered.

"That isn't what I asked."

"I know it isn't what you asked." Will sighed and fell back, looking up at the roof of his tent. "I promised Molly to do what was best for him."

"And that if that means-"

"If that means that leaving him behind will be what's best, then I suppose that's what I'll have to do," Will cut in firmly with a roll of his eyes. "That's the whole point of being a parent. You do what's best for the child in your care and if Margot and Alana are what's best, then that's what he'll get."

"That's quite mature of you."

Will groaned as he sat back up to find Beverly pacing through the brush with her arms swinging boredly at her sides. "I'd like to think that I'm an adult," Will grumbled out, getting to his feet to follow wherever Beverly guided him. Beverly shot him a smirk and he rolled his eyes as they passed through trees in the opposite direction of the family cemetery. "Am I not mature?" Beverly shot a look at Will, brows rose in disbelief and Will laughed. "Me running away after someone I love isn't mature."

"Not in the slightest," Beverly agreed. "But I don't think it's done much harm. Personally, I think it's been better for the both of you."

Will winced at the warped and twisted view that he was giving himself. Some sick justification of all of his actions from the beginning of time. "You've always been a better liar than me, Bev," Will whispered, a dull pain working its way through his system. "I miss you, you know."

"I know," she assured with a nod, making her way down an embankment to where a steady stream of water was happily running, trickling soothing through the forest. Will followed after her, a hand out behind him to help balance him in case he fell due to the steep angle. "But you can't hold onto me anymore. You shouldn't hold on to any of us anymore."

Will straightened himself up and stopped at the edge of the creek before bending down to let his hand dip into the icy water. It burned his fingers, but he didn't quite mind it. Birds still sung sweetly in the warming air, though Will couldn't find any of them in the trees.

Will couldn't find it in himself to answer as he stepped his way across the stream and further into the forest. He had let Jack go and Walter go. They were the easiest. They weren't dead. They didn't cling to him like death did a corpse. Molly had fallen silent, but was still present. Not visually, but her aura was strong in the back of Will's mind. The honey sweet, gentleness that made her up lingered in him. He hoped that in time she would fade like others had when he had stopped finding their voices useful, but he didn't know when that day would be.

Abigail dallied as well. The guilt with her was too great for Will to ignore. The same guilt that he was certain Hannibal was currently working through with the construction of someplace nice for his sister to be.

A cabin greeted Will in the distance and he started towards it, Bev a step behind him, silently waiting for his answer, though nothing came. Will halted in front of the door that was falling off its hinges, the wood rotting away. Will carefully pulled on the door until it opened and he had to prop it up so it wouldn't collapse.

"I know I can't hold onto all of you," Will finally stated, stepping into the tiny one room cabin. Dust littered every inch of space there was for it to occupy. "But you're the voice of reason in my head, Bev."

There was a table thrown aside, a crack down the middle of it. A bed was torn apart and beside an ash filled fireplace sat the mattress and some blankets. The air held a bitter stiffness to it and Will frowned as something cold clawed at his skin.

"This is where it happened, isn't it?" Beverly asked in a soft voice, glancing around the cabin.

"Where Hannibal became Hannibal?" Will questioned, taking a step backwards and out of the cabin. Beverly followed after him and Will did his best to try to block the feeling of overstepping from his system. Will closed up the door and looked over the old building once more before turning his back on the memory he shouldn't have trespassed on. Instead, he followed the river, doing his best to keep phantom hands from snatching at him to drag him away from his sibling to be slaughtered in the snow. "How do I let you go, Bev?"

"You've always had a voice of reason." Beverly shrugged. "Just add your own face back to it. Why does it need to take the shape of any one particular person?"

"Because if it has your shape then I wasn't the one who killed you."

Will's eyes widened at the truth that came from his mouth and he paused, running a hand through his hair. Beverly glanced over him, a warm smile on her lips.

"You didn't kill me. I told you I couldn't take the evidence to Jack until I could back it up."

"Bev-"

"Your exact words to me were: Stay away from Hannibal Lecter. I didn't listen." Beverly gave a deep breath. "You can let me go. You're not guilty."

"Then why do I feel like it's all my fault?"

"Because you know you're like him. You've always been like him. You were capable of killing me too," Beverly explained like it was so easy. So utterly simple. Will stopped and inhaled with an extremely deep breath, hands resting on his hips as he looked around the wood that he was sure was a wonderfully green color when it warmed up and a dazzling display of bright colors in the fall. Too bad that each time he had seen it, it had been nearly winter. "But you didn't and you never will be the reason for my death and you need to accept that. You need to let that all go."

"Forgive me for keeping you from your rest," Will muttered, meeting the woman's deep eyes that were bright with a smile. "You can go, Bev."

"Thank you Will."

Chapter 45

Chapter Summary

The desire to assess the damage was immediate and Will’s hand reached up to his face to feel at his left temple and cheek bone to make sure that they weren’t broken. He didn’t care about the possibility of broken teeth or the blood that he had fallen into. All he cared about was if he were going to get the stars in his vision to disappear so he could once more be inside of the tomb instead of in an epilepsy starter pack.

Chapter Notes

Much love being sent to Wanda Maximoff. I don't want to go into too much detail, but they are having a medical procedure done and needs all our prayers and well wishes. I hope that everything goes well and that you come back to us soon to read. We love you very much!

Losing You Terrifies Me

“You’ve been awfully quiet,” a light voice commented, pulling Will’s attention from Hannibal’s work. Hannibal had been gone for several hours and Will was curious if the man had returned to the castle for something or other or maybe wandered into the nearby town for more supplies. “Haven’t spoken to me in so long.”

"Abigail," Will sighed, turning away from the fully built structure. He leaned his back up against the tree he had been hiding behind for hours at a time and looked over the girl who was once more dressed rather inappropriately for the weather. Always barefoot, but this time in overall shorts with a forest green t-shirt beneath it. "Forgive me."

She pursed her lips, hands clasping behind her back and she shook her head, glancing around the forest. "So this is where it all started, huh?" she asked without missing a beat and throwing Will for a small loop. "Where all of our beginnings and ends came from."

Will glanced back over his shoulder and to the castle in the distance that was still dark and gloomy, especially against the greying sky. The tallest tower seemed to stab at the clouds with its spiky spires.

"Yes."

"I thought it would look more.... Cheerful," she muttered, head tipping to the side as she followed Will's gaze. "You'd think a castle would be more magical. Especially a palace where children grew up."

"Dark magic is more like it."

"Do you think he would have turned out the same?"

Will turned back at the question and rested his head back against the tree trunk with a deep breath. "I don't have the faintest."

"Curious if we would have met all the same. Maybe in a different world you both still would have saved me, but..." Abigail shrugged, attention turning back to Will, her dark brown curls bouncing with the movement. "There's no use thinking about what ifs and could have beens, is there?"

"No," Will agreed softly. "I suppose not."

"Dad, what do you suppose is going to happen to me?"

"To you?" Will ran a hand through his curls with a deep breath and then rubbed at his tired eyes. "What do you mean?"

"Well, you're going to forget about me, aren't you?" She stepped forward in the same childlike stance she had been using since the first time she had appeared to Will. Shoulders swaying back and forth like in a dance while her feet went toe first like a ballerina. "You'll take Hannibal back with you and be with Walter and I won't matter anymore."

"Of course you'll matter," Will argued sharply, only to receive a sad little side smile from the teen.

"No I won't. You'll forget all about me and move on."

"How could I possibly forget you Abigail?" Will pushed himself off the tree and moved over to the girl, reaching out to take her cheek in his hand. Her insanely blue eyes met his, wet with tears. "I will never forget you."

"It's ok if you do." She shrugged all while leaning into his palm. "I would understand."

“I won’t forget you,” Will repeated firmly, thumb brushing over her cheek. “You will always be special to Hannibal and me. Nothing will ever change that.”

“But...” Abigail pressed, that sad smile only growing. “It is time for all of us to move on. You can’t keep holding onto me. It isn’t right, Dad, and you know it.”

Will licked at his lips with a nod, but couldn’t bring himself to say anything. His hand dropped back to his side as she pulled from his grip to move closer to the edge of the hill overlooking the tomb.

“My parents are waiting for me anyways.”

“Your mother and father,” Will supplied, causing Abigail to nod.

“Yep. But you’ll be ok. You have your own family to take care of now. You don’t need me.”

“Abigail, I-”

“It’s ok, Dad. You can let me go, just like you’ve let everyone else go. It’s time.”

Will inhaled with a nod and looked down at his shoes. “You’ll be alright?”

“Of course I will.”

“I’m sorry I wasn’t there for you like I should have been.”

“Thanks Will.”

Night fell far more swiftly than Will had thought it would and he found himself sitting at his campfire once again, another can of food in his hand that he dug through with a spoon. For the first time in a long, long time, ever since his wife had died, his mind was silent.

It was an eerie sort of quiet that came with an abandoned building. The same uneasy stillness that Will had felt on stakeouts where he was meant to sit hidden away for hours at a time waiting for something to happen. The kenopsia that came when one had to stop at a rest stop on the highway in the middle of the night. His head tipped at the epiphany. He had thought that with the people put to rest that a sweet quiet would envelop him and that he could once more have his mind to himself, but it was unsettling.

He wished there was a way to put a name to it, to describe exactly what it was that made his teeth clench and his hair stand on end. He wished he understood why his muscles were tense and his gut was unsettled.

It wasn’t until he let his fire dwindle away into nothing and the nightlife came more to life around him that he finally got his answer. It wasn’t that he was alone. It had never been that he was alone. Even with his mind quieted, he wasn’t alone. Hadn’t been the whole time, if he had been honest with himself. He had known it deep down in his bones. Something that had been nagging at him, but he had pushed it aside because it had been the same feeling he had the first time he had come to this place. A feeling of being watched and not alone.

It had been Chiyoh the first time. Both of them watching each other. She wasn’t here as far as he knew. Now that he thought about it, he didn’t know what had happened to her after being shot. He hoped she was well. He was certain that Hannibal would have taken care of her in any capacity that she needed. He hoped that now she was free to do what she needed to do, be who she wanted to be.

Hannibal hadn't been watching him. Will had lived with those hungry lion-like eyes on him for years. He knew what it felt like to have a cannibal look at him, stare at him, devour him with a simple look. Even when he couldn't remember the man's name, he would have known if the man were staring at him. Hannibal wasn't in the woods with him.

The sound of a branch snapping sent Will to his knees and he pulled his gun from where it sat on his hip in its holster. He checked the magazine to make sure it was loaded and shoved it back into the holder before cocking the gun.

His eyes darted around the dark, the trees nearly blending into the night. The only light he had was from the moon that was barely a crescent in the sky and was hidden behind large storm clouds that didn't lend him much to work with.

He held his breath as he waited for another form of movement. Any hint of something else in the woods with him. Something different than an animal. He had hunted those with his father. He knew exactly what it felt like to have something bigger than you stare you down. This wasn't that feeling either.

A hushed whisper caught Will's attention and he rose to his feet, turning towards the voice. Will couldn't make out the words being said and he wasn't sure if maybe the low voices had turned the words to a muffled mess or if they were really in a different language, but that didn't matter.

Thunder rolled and cut off the voices, but Will started off in the direction that they had come from. Through tree after tree with his gun held in front of in and down, ready to be lifted and aimed at a moment's notice in whatever direction he needed it to be.

Will came to a stop behind the tree that he had been using the last while to hide behind and watch Hannibal work. Will glanced around its large trunk to see, curiously enough, Hannibal. Will had watched the man return to Chiyoh's quarters and get ready for bed like he had every night and then had returned to his own camp.

Maybe it had been Hannibal that he had heard speaking. Hannibal had begun a habit of speaking to himself while he worked, but that didn't seem like the right explanation either. Hannibal was coming from a completely different direction. Coming from the other end of the family plot where a much smaller gravestone for Mischa had been.

Being carried respectfully in both of Hannibal's arms was a large box shaped object and it took a moment for Will to finally make out the correct shape in the dark of the night. A casket. Mischa. Or whatever had been left of Mischa. By the looks of the box, it didn't seem quite big enough for a young child, but it was also bigger than an urn or a newborn's casket.

Will's stomach churned at the idea that Mischa was merely scattered body parts in the casket. That maybe parts of her were missing. He had never considered the idea. He knew that she had been eaten, but he had never given thought to what parts of her might have been taken and used. If her body was hacked up in an attempt to eat or if she had been handled with a bit more respect.

Will's heart sank at the idea of Hannibal finding his sister's body. Having to leave it behind while he ran or maybe he hadn't seen it until he had come back as a teenager to bury her. Maybe Hannibal had been spared the trauma of seeing his sister cut to parts and pieces and hopefully all that was left were the bones of the girl. Or... Will hadn't even considered what the wild animals might have done to her body if Hannibal really had had to wait until he was older to find her.

So many questions swirled through his head, but he didn't dare give them a voice. Hannibal would tell him if Hannibal wanted to and Will wasn't about to use his empathy to dig into it further than he already had. Stepping into the cabin had been more than enough for a day. The fear that oozed through the walls and the stench of cooked flesh that clung to the air, though it hadn't been there in years.

Will shook his head to push the memory he didn't have permission to explore from his head and focused back on his husband who had disappeared into the beautifully made stone tomb. A whole altar just for his dear sister. A proper place for her to rest exactly as she deserved.

If there was one part of Hannibal that Will could accept wholly without fight, it was the man's deep love for Mischa. She was all he had in the darkest points of his life and Will didn't dare tread on those moments or the comfort they brought Hannibal. Mischa was now as sacred for Will as she was to Hannibal and nothing would ever change that. If someone had been wonderful enough to shape Hannibal into the man that Will loved, then she would be cherished.

Will's head snapped up at a rustle of brush on the hillside and he ducked back behind the tree, listening while willing his heart to slow. The rustling stopped as if cut dead and Will's brows furrowed as he once more glanced around the tree. Down below, not noticing in the slightest, Hannibal exited the large stone structure and went back in the direction of where Mischa's old grave was located.

As soon as Hannibal was out of sight, swallowed up by the dark, the rustling started again. It was so loud that Will wondered how Hannibal hadn't noticed it. Maybe Hannibal had and just hadn't cared to do anything about it. Will clearly remembered that Hannibal's home back in Baltimore didn't even contain a security system, which was how Beverly had been so easily able to slip into his home.

Hannibal had never been too horribly concerned with the monsters out in the world and Will didn't see that changing any time soon. Hannibal was among the top of them, but that didn't mean that he had to be stupid about it. He should have at least been vigilant. Or maybe Will had it all backwards. Maybe Hannibal had it all under control and Will just needed to relax.

Will glanced back around the tree when the rustling distanced itself from him and blinked through the dark to see what it was. It wasn't until a flash of lightning lit up the night sky that Will made out the shape of four men. Large men, larger than Will, stalking their way to the open tomb that Hannibal had vacated.

Will's heart jumped into his throat at the figure of Hannibal on the horizon, but he didn't dare move. His feet were cemented in place as he watched his husband make his way back into that tomb that he had hand built for his sister with a shovel in hand.

The world around Will fell silent as the scent of inorganic burning, like wires or plastic, filled in around him. The only sound was the rumbling thunder as the moments ticked on. Tick, Tick, Tick.

Rain began to patter down and over the empath until his curls clung to his face and his clothes began to stick to his body. The lump in his throat only seemed to grow when no one and nothing stepped out of that grave. He had no indication of who had come out on top or if there was anything left in that tomb. No lights, no noise, no people.

With heavy feet, Will pushed himself from behind the tree and made his way down the hill that was now muddy and slick with the falling rain that was beginning to come down in sheets. He wasn't ready yet. He couldn't face Hannibal yet. There was a reason that Will had stayed on the very outskirts of Hannibal's life for the last handful of days. He wasn't ready to face that man who he had tried to kill a multitude of times over and admit to him that he had been right all along.

Will's insides twisted as the monster tugged at the chains that he had put it in. Chains that had been made of impenetrable steel that had become to rust and crack the moment he had met another monster that was free, but trained to behave. How jealous he had been of that freedom. How jealous he had been of the collected coolness of Doctor Hannibal Lecter as he played his cards as if he could see the entire poker table from behind his own hand. Hannibal Lecter who liked to deal in fate and came out on top constantly. The devil in a suit and tie that Will didn't dare try to wake from his slumber until Will had been awakened from his in the middle of a mental institute.

Will stopped on the outside wall beside the doorway, back up against the stone that sucked the little warmth he still had through his soaked jacket. His gun was held up as his lifeline and he rounded the corner to look into the tomb.

If Will had more of a moment to look around, he probably would have been impressed with how nicely the inside had turned out. How smooth the walls were, how carefully the flooring was laid down, how sweetly each candle was lit and place to keep each step cast in a fluttering golden color, the way that the casket had been given the right of the very center of the room that was shadowed by an oversized cross. The casket sat on an altar, a singed red ribbon adorning the top of it, in between the pillars that held up the roof that was much taller than Will had originally thought it would be. Every inch of this place was polished as if a master craftsman had constructed it and Will wondered if there was anything that Hannibal couldn't be absolutely perfect in achieving.

A flick of lightning brought Will back to himself as shadows of men danced along the walls of the tomb. Four men behind the casket and what looked like a rope. Will tightened his grip on his gun and stepped over to the casket that had been jostled.

A dark lump laid on the ground in front of the casket and Will's eyes narrowed as he stepped closer to it. His shoes slipped on the floor and Will thought that maybe it was the rain he was dripping across the floor, but the puddle was far darker than water.

Will's chest tightened at a shadow of movement in his peripheral and he turned to follow the movement. The ding sound echoed through Will's ears like he had shoved his head into a bronze church bell and it had gone off to signal it were time to say the lord's prayer. Without his permission, his body dropped to the floor, gun fumbling from his hand as the stunned shock of the impact began to set in.

The desire to assess the damage was immediate and Will's hand reached up to his face to feel at his left temple and cheek bone to make sure that they weren't broken. He didn't care about the possibility of broken teeth or the blood that he had fallen into. All he cared about was if he were going to get the stars in his vision to disappear so he could once more be inside of the tomb instead of in an epilepsy starter pack.

The oddest part to Will, as his body fought to get back to his feet, was the fact that Will knew exactly where he was and what had happened, even if a numbness was settling into the left side of his face. His fingers found nothing out of place, thankfully and returned to help the rest of his body in the attempt to right himself.

The shovel. Someone had hit him with the shovel and it wasn't Hannibal. The man's build was different from Hannibal's. There had been four, but whoever Will was using for stability had been taken out by Hannibal.

The harsh prickle of a jute rope wrapped around his throat and Will to his knees. In a blind panic, Will's hands jumped to the rope, clawing desperately at it. He gasped and coughed, trying to get oxygen through the restricted airway.

Stop and think, Will ordered himself through the mess of his head.

With fingers going numb, one of Will's hands dropped down to his boot where his hunting knife sat. He ripped it free and flicked it open as quickly as he could, fisting the handle in his hand and drilling it back as harshly as he could into the man's leg.

There was a loud cry of pain in Will's ear that was nearly as deafening as the shovel bouncing off his skull, but the rope around his throat loosened. Will inhaled sharply with a sputtering cough, forcing himself to focus back on the knife in his hand that was still embedded in the man's leg.

Will tugged it free and turned, plunging the blade into the man's chest, a refreshing feeling through him. A breath of air like he had just gotten home from a long day of work and kicked off his shoes. A moment of peace as the blade sunk down to the hilt only for Will to pull it back again.

The man tumbled back, a hand going to his chest, but Will didn't care. He lunged forward, straddling the man and sinking the knife back into the man's flesh.

There had been a handful of times that Will had felt this sensation before and all of them had to do with Hannibal and killing. The first was with Garret Jacob Hobbs. The feeling of power that had run through him and kept him shaking and jittery long after the rest of the FBI had shown up. Next had been with Eldon Stammets. Though Will hadn't been able to kill him, the idea that he had the man under his thumb and could pull the trigger at any time was thrilling.

Randel Tier was next. The way that snapping the man's neck had jolted up his arms, echoing the sensation up to his brain had sent his heart into a fluttering overdrive. Freddie Lounds had been close to meeting her end. Will nearly considered disposing of the thorn in his side, but had ultimately decided against it when he realized how they could trace her back to him so easily with the continuous scuffle that existed between them. Biting into Cordell's cheek had heightened his senses and brought him closer to Hannibal still, opened up some understanding doorway between them with that little smirk from Hannibal when Will had spit the flesh from his mouth and sticky red dripped down his chin.

And then sending Chilton into that checkmate. Will couldn't deny the wicked sense of control and satisfaction that came to him when he stepped into that hospital room and was greeted with a charcoaled doctor who honestly shouldn't have been alive.

Francis Dolarhyde really had been just what Will had said and that honestly wasn't terrifying anymore and Will didn't know why he had fought it for so long. Beautiful. That's what their dance had been. A waltz that someone had perfectly choreographed between the cannibal and empath.

Jordan and Casey had been an adrenaline riddled rush, an itch that needed to be scratched. The same way that drilling a knife through Jordan had tired out his arms like it was now was a delicious revelation at how strong Will actually was to be able to take the reins.

Liam Jefferies and his goonies had been enjoyable. There was no point in denying it. It had reawakened something in Will that he had forgotten had existed. Something that he had reveled in all night and the next morning as he scrubbed down that hotel room. Something dark and horrible that he could share with Hannibal that Hannibal wouldn't judge him for. Something that Hannibal would gently encourage, like a kind push from a parent towards a child who was learning to ride a bike for the first time.

As for this moment... Will's rushing blood was waking up his brain, though he had been fairly certain he was already awake. His smile grew of its own accord and Will couldn't even begin to dream of hiding what this had ignited in him. He was going to be black and blue by the end of this, but honestly, that's what he had been built for. The abuse was his to live through and make his own and he wasn't about to let it control him again.

A strong pair of hands snatched up his shoulders and he was ripped away from the whimpering body and his knife. His feet staggered as they attempted to catch himself as he was shoved away from his prey.

Arms of the fourth man circled around his chest and pulled him in tightly, restraining him as man number three came after him. A strike of lightning filled the stone encasement and thunder regurgitated itself repeatedly around them, the rain almost as loud. In the sharp light contrast, Will could make out something glittery on the fist that was coming for him.

The blow to his ribs knocked the air from him and he doubled over, coughing as he gasped once again for air. The arms around his chest held him in place and Will's vision blurred with tears as his ribs rippled pain, possibly broken from the brass across number three's knuckles.

A handful of his hair was seized and his head was back, pain alight across his scalp from the rip. The world went bright once more and Will found it hard to breathe as the fist connected with his face.

He could feel the knife through butter like tear of his skin over his cheek and the sticky heat of his own blood rushed down the side of his face and filled his mouth with a sickly coppery saltiness. The world spun and Will's knees went limp as he tried to regain control of his body.

With all of the strength he could find in his legs, he threw his body weight forward and tugged Four with him to the floor. Will's ribs screamed and the sound reached his ears, meaning he must have made it aloud, though he couldn't quite register it having been produced. Another crack of lightning illuminated the space and sent a halo of light around Will's gun. He scrambled from his fetal position towards the weapon and scooped it up.

His body turned as it had been trained to do and from where he lay on the ground, he fired a shot that lit up the room like the lightning. There was a sob indicating that Will had hit his mark and then a thud of a body falling. Will wasn't sure if he had hit Three or Four, but he honestly didn't care. The thrill wasn't lessened in the slightest.

The room fell silent save for the outside storm and Will stayed quiet, looking through the dark room to find the last of the four men missing. Will's eyes narrowed and pushed himself slowly from his back, to his knees and then his feet. Had he run? Will hadn't seen a body go for the exit. He hadn't heard any rushed running.

With a deep breath, Will leaned over, spitting his mouthful of crimson to the floor. He cautiously stepped his way around the altar, the lightning not even giving up any secrets for him. But it highlighted a rope that Will had completely forgotten about. A rope that had been thrown over one of the exposed beams in the ceiling and tied to one of the pillars.

Will rounded the casket and stopped at a man on his knees, ankles tied and hands restrained behind his body and hoisted up at a hideous angle with the rope that stretched sky high. His face was cut up over one cheek and Will wondered if the shovel or the brass knuckles had taken him down.

“I was beginning to wonder if you were going to grace me with your presence, darling boy,” Hannibal muttered in English with a chuckle lacing his words. It was almost odd to hear the accented voice instead of the melodic Lithuanian Will had been listening to over the recent days.

Will stayed silent, unsure what to say. Instead he spit another mouthful of blood to the floor. His eyes trailed over his husband, but Will wasn’t able to make anything out in the darkness of the room. He took in the room one more time, still finding it void of the fourth person, and went for the closest lit candle. The flame danced as Will moved it closer to the killer until it splashed the smallest bit of light over Hannibal’s face.

Hannibal’s eyes were soft with a kind smile that didn’t pull at his lips, but if Will had to guess, Hannibal was truly happy to see him. Will wished the feeling was mutual. Happy wasn’t exactly the right word, though Will wasn’t sure what could be right. Not when the hair on the back of his neck still stood on end, ready for what could possibly be waiting for him.

“You left,” Will finally stated, voice far more cracked and broken than he wanted it to be, his body feeling a little weaker now that the pain was beginning to set in. His ribs thudded annoyingly in his chest and his face was brightly aflame. “You fucking left, Hannibal. I-”

With a huff, the words were knocked out of Will’s mouth and his body connected sharply with the floor beneath him. He groaned at the crying of his ribs. His wrist was snatched up and slammed against the floor, causing his gun to drop from his hand before he had a chance to regain his grip.

The man above him scooped the weapon up and aimed it at Will’s face. Will forced his knee into the man’s back and threw him off balance, allowing Will the chance to scramble to his knees to reach for the closest thing he could find.

His hands grabbed up the handle of the shovel and the metal loud as it scraped across the floor as Will pulled it to himself. He lifted it from the floor and it immediately tried to jump from his hand with a shower of sparks.

The thunderous roar of the gun was nearly hidden beneath another rumble of thunder and Will’s heart stuttered in his chest as he struggled to regrasp the shovel that had deflected a bullet for him. He turned, swinging the shovel as hard as he could and felt the collision up the handle and into his arms.

It dropped the last man instantly with a moan. Will stepped closer, kicking his gun from the man’s hand before raising the shovel over his head. It came down on the man’s back, knocking the rising figure back to the floor.

A strong, maroon stare flushed Will a blushing red, embarrassment pooling through him at the captive audience. He did his best to ignore the encouragement radiating from his husband as the shovel leveled the last intruder once more.

Will stepped around the body, looking at the man for as long as it took him to get back to his knees before he thrust the blade of the shove down and into the man's back. The sensation was so far detached from a shovel hitting dirt that it sent shock through Will that only lasted a breath before he repeated the action.

Over and over, the sounds sickening, but overtaken by the thunder outside.

"Will," a faraway voice called to him, though it too was muffled.

It felt good, straight down into his bones, it felt good. Excitement danced in the core of what and who he was as a gurgling death rattle came from the intruder's throat. Why hadn't Will leaned into this earlier? Why hadn't he aligned his mind with his soul in the beginning? It was so crystal clear now.

"Will."

For once in the big, wide world of confusion, Will knew where he was heading and how. He knew that he no longer needed that wendigo to guide him through the forest. He could see the path perfectly, but he would keep the wendigo at his side.

The buzz from power was addictively drunkening. His body no longer ached, instead it was bright with life. High with adrenaline and a racing heart. Ready to take on the world and strike down any being that so much as dared to look in his direction.

"Will."

The weapon careened down with a final strike, the shovel reverberating as it hit the stone floor. Will stared, blinking through the dim candle light, curious as to why he had hit the floor when he had been so certain that he had been hitting a body.

A sense of satisfaction filled Will's chest as he looked over a death that would have obviously been a figment of some novelist's imagination. The shovel fell from his hand and clattered to the floor beside the decapitated body that was swimming in a puddle of scarlet that caught the lightning like a glass of Lambrusco.

Will inhaled deeply, trying to steady his panting. The sweet metallic twang of a jar of change was strong, even among the newly poured concrete scent. His eyes flickered around his work, pride flaring as he made his way to his gun. He picked it up from the ground and returned it to its rightful place against his hip before he stepped past a curiously watching Hannibal and to one of the other men beside the altar.

Will knelt down and reached out, removing his knife with a hard jerk. He checked each of the remaining bodies for life before turning his attention back to the man sitting in submission upon his knees.

"How did they get to you?" Will mocked, steps slow and calculated. "You must have known they were here." He rounded the space and was met with a wickedly curved smile and bright, proud eyes that followed the line of his body, assessing the damage left behind.

"Grave robbers," Hannibal supplied, though his attention didn't deviate from Will. "They have been casing out the place for about as long as you have been, darling boy."

“Don’t call me that,” Will instructed. “I am in no mood to deal with your charm, Hannibal.”

“I just can’t discern why they wouldn’t have waited for my departure or tried for my home. There’s nothing of value here other than my sister’s remains,” Hannibal continued on like Will hadn’t said a word and Will could feel that same bubbling anger that had caused him to pull his gun on Hannibal not too long ago. The same itching in the back of his skull that had ended with an engagement. “One of them hit me with the shovel, though...” Hannibal’s eyes turned to where Will’s last victim lay before they flickered back to Will with a swirling darkness in them. “They did not use the same finesse that you did.”

Will chuckled with a shake of his head. He grabbed up the hem of his shirt and used it to clean the blade of the knife, noting the way that Hannibal’s head tipped in curiosity. “What do you want, Hannibal? Drop the mask. I already told you that I don’t want to deal with the bull shit charm. I won’t repeat myself again.”

“I have what I want already, Will,” Hannibal assured, eyes tight on the knife as Will bent over to return the weapon to his boot. “Anything more would feel like challenging the gods.”

Will’s eyes flashed as they shot up to Hannibal. Will straightened himself and stepped closer to the man, spitting another mouthful of blood from his lips. “You said you don’t fear the gods,” Will whispered, dropping to his knees to be level with Hannibal.

“Are all of those lovely little memories back in place then?”

The words were punctuated to make sure each one stuck out in the air between them. “Each and every single one, Hannibal.” Will looked over Hannibal’s injuries, enjoying the way that the red looked black in the faux moon made of candle light. “From the very beginning us to now. From the first moment I heard your name.” Will’s voice had softened slightly and he reached out, caressing over Hannibal’s cut cheek. Hannibal inhaled sharply at the contact, but his eyes stayed strongly connected to Will’s gaze.

A flash of lighting sent a flicker of shine up to Will and Will’s hand wandered down to where his attention was. Over Hannibal’s jaw and down his neck to where a chain greeted his fingertips.

“Bastard,” Will hissed, fingers snatching up the chain and what ornamented it, only to rip it from Hannibal’s neck. The chain snapped and fell limp in Will’s hand. “You took it. You fucking took it back.”

“You had no use for it,” Hannibal defended, but he must have known the excuse to be weak because he didn’t follow it up with anything more substantial at Will’s bitter look.

“I’m your fucking husband, you asshole.” Will pulled the ring from the chain and tossed the chain aside to be forgotten before he placed the ring back onto his finger, the bone adorning his skin beautifully in the flickering firelight. A breath of air filled Will’s lungs and tugged painfully at his tender ribs as the familiarity of the ring wiped the odd feeling from its place. “I thought I had lost it. I couldn’t remember you and about had a panic attack when it was just gone.”

“I didn’t-”

“Why did you leave?” Will demanded, hands thrown to his sides and now fists. He was met with silence and his chest tightened. “Why did you leave, Hannibal?”

“Walter wanted me to.”

“So you listened to a little kid?”

“I don’t think you quite grasp the situation that-”

“What on earth would make you listen to an eleven year old?”

“A gun,” Hannibal supplied, unsure he would be able to get of a longer answer out than that. Will’s expression grew to a confused curiosity and his lips twisted into a pained small with a snort of laughter. “He’s your son, Will.”

“He is,” Will agreed with a nod. His hands relaxed and with a sigh he once more reached out to caress Hannibal’s face. “He’s yours now too, you know.” Hannibal’s eyes slid closed and he leaned into Will’s palm, pressing a kiss to the skin there that was tacky with dried blood. “We can finally be a family, can’t we? The one that you promised me so long ago?”

“Yes,” Hannibal whispered, giving Will’s hand another kiss. “Once I say goodbye to my sister, we’ll get your son and be a family like I promised.”

Will couldn’t stop the whimper from his throat and he leaned over, kissing the man in front of him. His breathing hitched as he fitted himself perfectly against the killer. The gentleness didn’t last long as Will’s hands tangled up in Hannibal’s greying hair and tugged at it to pull Hannibal into an angle to deepen the kiss.

Will pulled back, leaving Hannibal breathing hard with glazed over eyes. “Our first kiss,” Will muttered with a pitiful chuckle and a shake of his head. “Didn’t think it would be like this.”

Hannibal’s brows furrowed in confusion. “This isn’t-”

“This isn’t our first, first kiss, Hannibal,” Will agreed quickly with a nod, resting his forehead to Hannibal’s. “But it’s our first kiss with my acceptance of all of my memories.” Will’s laugh was a little louder this time and he cut it off with another kiss that quickly turned into a moan. “I hate how charming you are,” he muttered between the heated kisses that Hannibal returned wholeheartedly. “How many times have you won me over? How many firsts have we had between us? Each version of me you loved.”

“I will always love every facet of you, Will.”

Will pulled away with a groan and wrenched Hannibal’s head back so he could attack Hannibal’s throat with his teeth. Hannibal gasped at the contact, but didn’t fight as a lacing of purples began to bloom over his skin.

“You left,” Will accused, nails digging into the back of Hannibal’s head, earning the empath a moan. “You left me, Hannibal.” Their bodies pressed to one another, hips to hips, chests to chests. Will’s claws dragged down and over Hannibal to rest on his tensed shoulders from the angle that his arms were still restrained into. “You’re not leaving me again.”

“Never,” Hannibal agreed on a forced breath.

Will pressed a lingering kiss to Hannibal’s pulse, feeling it pound beneath his lips. He licked hungrily at it before his teeth latched onto Hannibal’s earlobe and gave it a tug. “The safe word is teacup, and I am going to make sure you fucking use it, Dr. Lecter," Will hissed, eyes dark and dangerous when he met Hannibal's gaze.

"Another first, dear Will?"

"I swear to Christ if you quote Madonna's Like a Virgin or something, I'm going to-"

Hannibal shook his head. "I've missed you is all."

"Prove it."

"Untie me."

Will laughed heartily and Hannibal's chest warmed at the sound he wasn't sure he would ever hear again. Will nipped playfully at Hannibal's lips with a deep sigh. "Not so fast, Dr. Lecter. You're not getting out of this that easily." Will pulled himself completely from Hannibal and rose to his feet to look over the rather intricate knotwork. "Impressive, if anything," Will praised, eyes following the line of the rope up and over the exposed beam.

He stepped past Hannibal and went to the pillar it was tied to, untying the knot, only to wrap the rope around his hand. The bite of the fibers against his skin made him smile as he gave an experimental tug. Hannibal groaned as his arms were pulled back behind him and Will spun around with a smirk. "Hush, monster," he instructed as he walked back to Hannibal, allowing the rope to go slack. "Hush."

Hannibal's shoulders slumped and he breathed a sigh of relief that Will didn't allow him to live in for long. He pulled the rope taut once more and there was a sharp inhale of hair through crooked teeth.

"Monster, I have a game for you to play," Will announced as he gathered up the slack rope and wrapped it further around his hand and then his wrist. He found himself at Hannibal's back and looked over the angle Hannibal knelt in. Submissive and silent and sweet. "It's called Remind Me Of Your Vows. Your empty, pretty vows to me." Will knelt down behind Hannibal, leaning over to kiss at the back of Hannibal's neck as one of his hands slipped around Hannibal's front to work at the fabric that was between them. "I'll help you start them." Will nipped at Hannibal's neck before pulling back to add all of his focus to pulling Hannibal's pants down to his knees. "I commit myself."

Hannibal let out a whimper and Will only smiled a bit more as he finally freed Hannibal. His hand immediately went to work, taking Hannibal's hard length and stroking it. Hannibal's head fell forward at the touch.

"I commit myself." The words were no more than a breath through an opened mouth. "To spend the rest..."

"Do continue Doctor Lecter," Will taunted in Hannibal's ear, his other hand maneuvering around its grip on the rope to pull at his belt. "What pretty little lies did you tell me that night?"

"To spend the rest of my days making yours as beautiful-"

"Beautiful," Will repeated for emphasis.

“-and complete-”

“Complete.” Will gave another pull at the rope in his hand and Hannibal moaned, shaking his head.

“Will,” he begged, but Will ignored him, the tightness in his jeans far too much for him to bear any longer. “Please.”

“We’re not done with the game, Doctor Lecter. Continue.”

Will pulled his hand from Hannibal and the man let out a whine at the loss of contact. Will wasn’t sure he had ever heard the man so absolutely weak before. Not even when he had been crying on the floor in their kitchen.

Will pulled himself free from the fabric of his jeans and, without more of a thought, spit into his hand, only turning the dried blood into a gummy mess. But what did it matter? They could be as dirty as they wanted. It was raining outside. Thunder still crackled, lightning still lit up the room like the second coming of Christ, so what if the pompous asshole got a little dirty? He could go clean off in the rain if he wanted to complain about it.

“Making yours as beautiful and complete as you have made mine since the day I met you,” Hannibal pressed on.

“Keep going,” Will instructed darkly as his fingers found their way to Hannibal’s entrance, circling it. Hannibal’s body stiffened slightly with a sharp exhale. Another tug of the rope was accentuated with a, “Keep fucking going, Doctor.”

Hannibal’s voice was absolutely shattered when he obeyed. “For you are the reflection of my very soul.”

“Am I?”

“Yes,” was gasped out as a finger pressed into him without so much as a warning. Will’s breath was magma against the nape of his neck as Will nuzzled himself there. “A reflection of a part that I-that I had lost....” Hannibal moaned at the hint of pain that came with an impatient second finger.

“Stay with me, monster. You’re not even close to being done yet.”

“I had lost many years ago.” Hannibal’s jaw clenched as he was worked open. His eyes shut tightly and all that was there was feeling. He couldn’t reach, couldn't touch, couldn’t control. He just had to sit and live in this moment. Let it happen around him and it was terrifying and made his heart pound in his chest. “And was gone un-until-” A moan ripped apart the words as Will’s fingers brushed that bundle of nerves deep inside of him. His breathing came in pants and Will chuckled.

“Is this too much, monster? Do you need me to stop?”

“No.” Hannibal shook his head.

“Then finish your vows to me.”

“Was gone until you gave it back to me.” The strain in Hannibal’s voice only made Will that much more impatient. But he wasn’t finished with Hannibal yet. Hannibal would regret leaving, even if a gun was aimed at his pretty face. He was going to learn once and for all who he belonged to and that this wasn't just a whenever-he-feels-like-it situation. "No lies."

"No lies," Will hissed in Hannibal's ear, earning him a moan.

"No secrets."

"No secrets."

"No laws- Will, please!"

"It's so fun to watch you unravel by my hand." Will gave Hannibal's neck another kiss, feeling the pulse just below the skin racing. "Who knew that fucking you was easier than manipulation?"

"Will!" Hannibal's legs had spread as far apart as the ropes around them allowed, only allowing Will that much more of an easy access to Hannibal's sweet spot. He brushed over it relentlessly, curious how long it would take for Hannibal to fall silent, like he could cause Will to do. Become nothing but a mindless, moaning mess. "More."

Will snickered against Hannibal's neck and shook his head. "After all of this and you think you deserve more?" His tongue trailed up Hannibal's neck, the taste of sweat and hard work present, only making Will ache more. But he could wait. He could draw this out for as long as he wanted. It was only fair, right? Of course it was. This was his design after all. "And we're still not done with our game." Hannibal whimpered, trembling against Will's body, hands snatching at the fabric of Will's shirt from the odd angle they were still being held again. "Something about death do us part?"

"And not even death," Hannibal gasped out around a harsh trust from Will's fingers and a tight tug on the rope, "will keep me apart from you for-"

"Not so fast, Doctor," Will interrupted. "I don't want to hear the last part yet." Will's fingers pulled from Hannibal and the tension released in his shoulders, his head falling forward with a whine until the rope caught him and held him in place. Will once more spit into his palm and ran his hand over his length with a relieved inhale. He released his grip on the rope just enough to allow Hannibal to relax into a much more preferable angle. Will lined himself up and pushed himself fully into Hannibal with a single thrust, pinning Hannibal's arms to his back and causing the man to straighten up with a gasp. "The rest of your vows," Will pushed with a deep breath as he focused on staying still, the tight heat enough to drive him mad.

"For you and I are one."

The words were weak and Will nodded, hiding his face in Hannibal's shoulder. The emotions rolling off of Hannibal sent Will's empathy into a skyrocket. Drowning him to the point where he was outside of himself until a whined version of his name jerked him back into place. Back into the tomb built with Hannibal's own hands that was now sanctified with spilt blood and bodies.

Will pulled back and snapped his hips back against Hannibal who gasped at the movement, hands twisting tighter into Will's bloodied shirt for any form of stability. Will's set pace was brutal, but there was no complaint, no argument from the Doctor. He simply took all of what Will gave him, stifled cries falling past his teeth without his permission.

The teeth that found Hannibal's flesh and bit into it sent Hannibal's head falling backwards onto Will's shoulder. The brightness of the pain given to him by his husband made him feel more alive than anything or anyone else ever could.

Will's free hand found its way back to Hannibal's cock and began stroking it with a fever that sent a spike of pleasure rushing up the man's strained back.

"Will," Hannibal begged, though he wasn't actually sure what for. He could no longer process what was actually happening, moans and whimpers and whines so loud, their mingled gasps and panting breath so lewd in the room over the thunder and rain. "Will."

Will unlatched his jaw from Hannibal's collar. "Hush, monster." His tongue licked over the reddening markings to sooth it and Hannibal shook his head. "Learn your lesson and I might let you come."

"Will!"

"I don't ever want you to abandon me again, Hannibal." Each work was accented with a harsh thrust that forced Hannibal off balance, once more being held up by his grip on Will's shirt and the rope around his arms that were now burning in the sweetest fire he could imagine. "For you are the reflection of my very soul. That's what you said, wasn't it, monster?"

"Yes."

"A reflection of a part that I had lost many years ago and was gone until you gave it back to me. Does that sound right?"

"Y-yes!" Hannibal gulped with a nod of his head, toes curling in his shoes as tight heat filled his gut.

"No lies, no secrets, no laws and not even death will keep me apart from you," Will repeated, his grip around Hannibal tightening. They were both so close, but Will wasn't sure he wanted to let go yet. He wanted this to sink into Hannibal the same way that he had wanted their first time to sink into him. Each sensation needed to be carved into the very being that was Hannibal Lecter.

Memories were tied and triggered by stimulus. Taste, touch, sound, smell.

Sear yourself into my skin.

Hannibal's fingers released and grasped at Will once more, nails catching the across his stomach, the bite harsh. There was not going to be a time without pain between them and Will didn't want there to be. The pain was theirs and it should stay that way.

"For you and I are one."

That was enough to send Hannibal over the edge with a bitten back moan. His body fell forward, weak against its restraints as he spilled over Will's hand. The tightness around Will brought his orgasm to him out of nowhere and he gasped, hiding his face in Hannibal's shoulder as he rode out the waves of pleasure, their gasping breath the only thing Will could hear.

"You didn't say anything about in sickness and in health, Hannibal," Will pressed on, licking at his lips as he straightened himself up. "But being a doctor, I think that means you have a double obligation to me."

"Will… I-"

"No." Will carefully removed himself from Hannibal and wiped his dirtied hand over Hannibal's thigh to clean it. "I'm not done with you yet." Will released his tight grip on the rope, letting it fall completely slack. Hannibal groaned and fell fully forward, laying across the stone floor, panting. Will steadied himself, cleaned himself up, put himself back together before he pulled his knife from his boot. "We're not done yet Hannibal. Not even close."

Will slipped the knife between Hannibal's ankles and began slicing through the thick rope there, the snapping sound hidden under the thunder. Once his ankles were free, Will moved onto the rope around Hannibal's shins.

"What is it you wish to discuss?" Hannibal asked, all calmness and poise back to his voice despite the way he was still breathing hard. Will didn't answer. Simply moved on to the rope binding Hannibal's wrists. Hannibal's hands stretched when they were free and Will moved onto the next at his elbow before the last one around Hannibal's biceps was released as well. Hannibal's arms fell slack and he winced as he stretched them out. "I miscalculated something."

"Your lack of commitment?" Will grumbled with a roll of his eyes as he closed up the knife and returned it to his boot.

"Walter."

Will's brows furrowed and he glanced up at the man who was still laying on the tomb floor, now staring up at the ceiling, still partly undressed, debauched, and rubbing at his sore arms.

"Oh, so soon?" Will asked, unable to hide the frustration in his voice. "I didn't expect you to bring him up until later."

"I was ready for the end," Hannibal admitted, pulling the anger from Will as he spoke. "Ready to die by your hand, but he came and he..." Hannibal trailed off, the thought going unspoken much to Will's curiosity, and a new line of thought was chosen. "He is brazen and incredibly stubborn."

"Qualities you and our son have in common."

"Our?" Hannibal pushed himself to sit up with a grimace, arms crying out in pain.

"I came for you," Will explained with a shrug. "For us to be a family, but if you say no I will be returning to Walter as a widower." Hannibal's lips twitched up into a smile and Will couldn't help but lean over and kiss it away.

"*Atsiprašau,"* Hannibal whispered through the kisses, something apologetic in his tone. "We should clean this place up. There's a freshly dug grave for the bodies."

Will chuckled with a roll of his eyes at the comment before shaking his head. "We're not done. You haven't said teacup yet."

Atsiprašau: I'm sorry

Chapter 46

Chapter Summary

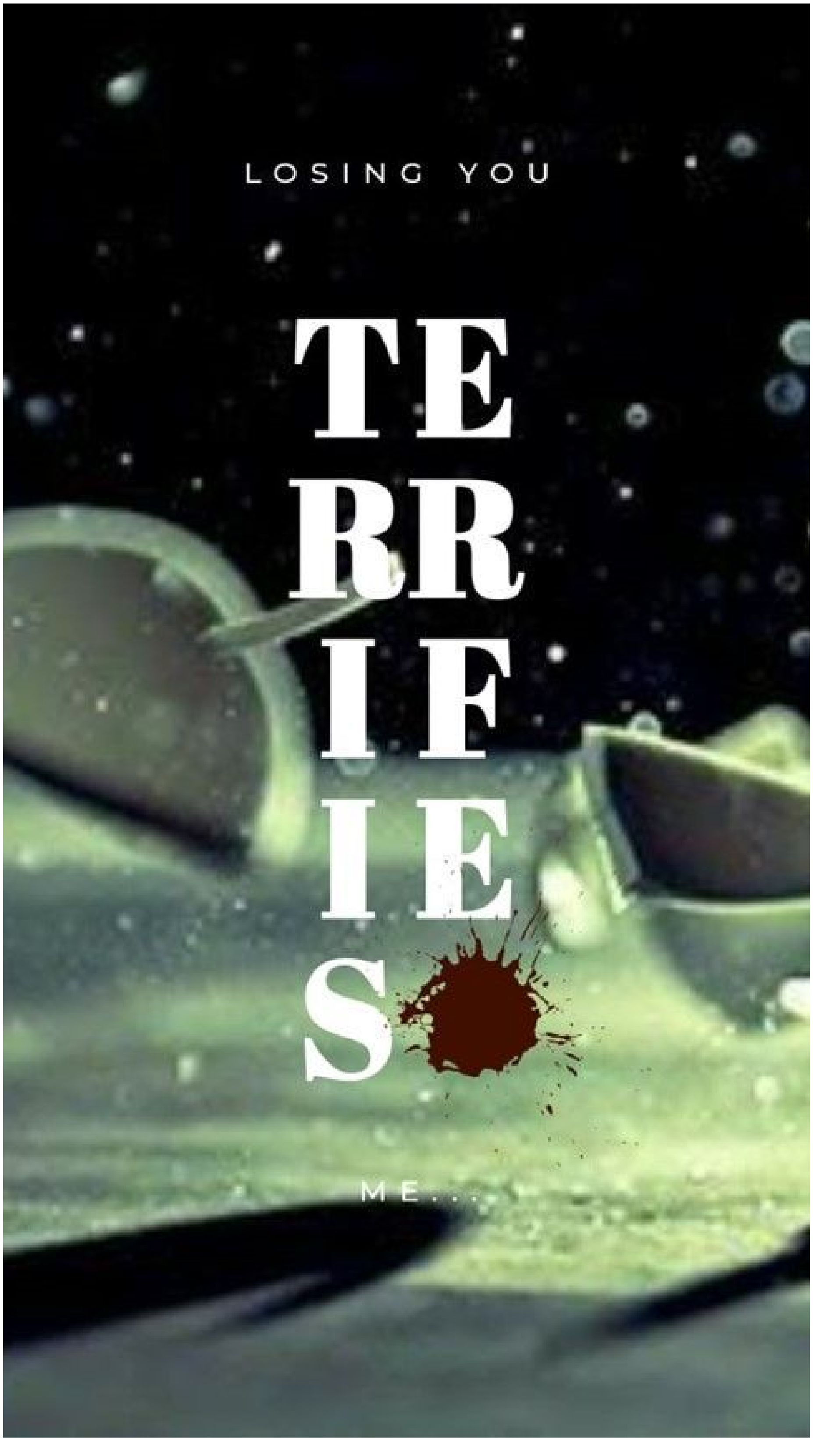
The footsteps were so loud they might as well have been in the closet with them. They were distant, but each one matched with the tick of his heart, and he did his best to steady his breathing so he didn't throw up. His mouth was filling with saliva and the backs of his jaw were beginning to tingle as if he had just eaten something sour.

Chapter Notes

Hello everyone. This has been quite an adventure, hasn't it? This is the last official chapter. Next week there will be one more update, but we have reached the end of Losing You Terrifies Me. Thank you all so much for all of your comments and kind words. Thank you so much for all of the support through all of these months and the last year that I have been working on this. It's legit been exactly a year since I started working on this story. Pretty insane.

Also a huge thank you to Child_of_Lilith. They were sweet enough to make a Spotify playlist of the songs from this story and then I went in an added a massive amount of the music that I use to write all of these chapters and a bunch of the sequel.
Link to playlist: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/65khRpKmjgRytQWwoG4hqo

Thank you all again and I hope you enjoy the last chapter. Let me know your thoughts in the comments and as always all my love from my beta and me!


LOSING YOU
TERRIFIES
ME...

Walter’s knee bounced anxiously under the dinner table as he picked at his food. His chest felt so tight that he might as well have been wrapped up like a mummy. He couldn’t breathe and his body ached with the want to run, though he stayed exactly in place.

There was an odd congested air around the dining room as if all of the others could feel just how much Walter was struggling with pulling air into his body. Even Applesauce laid in the corner of the room with a gentle continuous whine as if she knew just what was awaiting them.

The feeling of the walls closing in had been a steady stream throughout the week, but now, in the final hours, it was all imposing. A churning in Walter's stomach reminded him of how he had felt while watching A New Hope for the first time. He was trapped in that trash compactor with some weird alien monster trying to eat him while the walls tried to turn him into swiss cheese with all of the shards of discarded metal.

Walter glanced once more at the clock on the wall, though an hour had passed, the minute hand informed him that it had been barely three minutes. With a deep breath, his eyes wandered over Alana and Margot who were eating with hushed whispers, probably discussing what to do tonight. Morgan sat to the side of Walter, happily sucked into one of his many books and munching on some turkey from the dinner. Why they had prepared a full-on Thanksgiving meal, Walter would never understand. Something that heavy sat like a rock in Walter’s stomach to the point where he had given up after several bites.

Friday had ticked by like the movement of a tectonic plate. It had come and gone and there was no Will, no Hannibal, no movement from the workers who Walter had overheard and Walter was beginning to wonder if maybe he had imagined the whole thing. Maybe he had made it up. But Morgan had been there too. Morgan had heard the exact same things. Morgan had confirmed as much to Walter on multiple occasions, though he had said he didn’t quite understand what the men had been saying.

All Walter knew was that his knuckles were beginning to ache from how hard he was clutching his chair and his jaw was clenched so tightly that his ears were ringing. He should be fine. He was fine. He was overreacting. They just had to finish dinner and then they would be away from this place.

Nothing had happened. Nothing would happen and his dad would come for him. Will would. Will had promised. Will didn’t break his promises. Will wouldn’t break this promise, even if it had the unfortunate side effect of Hannibal Lecter to come with it.

“Wally, please try to eat,” Alana pushed gently, her demeanor having shifted slightly during the last few days to something not quite as overbearing. It had made Walter’s skin crawl the first time he had sensed the change, but it didn’t bother him as entirely anymore. It had been a nice reprieve from what she had been before. “We have to catch a flight soon. There won’t be anything until we reach where we’re going.”

“Right,” Walter muttered, swallowing around a lump in his throat. He reached out for his cup and took a drink of water in place of food, hoping that it wouldn’t land like a rock in his stomach.

“Morgan, please put the book down and eat, sweetie,” Margot called, getting from her seat beside Alana and stepping around the table. She brushed through Morgan’s hair with one hand and the other pulled the book from his hand, laying it on the tabletop. “Come on. We have to leave soon.”

“I’m not hungry anymore,” Morgan explained, trying to reach for his book once more, but Margot took up his hand. She leaned over and pressed a kiss to his hand and Walter had never agreed with

Morgan as much as he did right now. Never been so not hungry in his life, which was an odd notion for him. He had always stacked his plate to the point of overflowing because the idea of not having enough food had been drilled into him and was a difficult habit to break. “Can’t we just go?” Walter glanced over and saw a frown across Morgan’s lips. “I don’t feel good.”

Alana inhaled deeply with a nod. “That seems to be the general consensus, doesn't it?” Her smile was brightly red but didn’t reach her eyes. “Let’s grab your things, boys. Come on.”

“My dad,” Walter muttered, eyes looking from Alana to Margot curiously, brows furrowed.

“We’ll find a way to reach out to him,” Alana assured. “I promise that once we’re safe, we will find a way if that is what you still want, but I want you to know that you are welcome to stay with us, Wally. I would like you to consider the concept of staying with us permanently. Margot and I want you to stay with us permanently if that is something you desire.”

“Why would you want that?” Walter asked in shock, eyes blown wide as he looked at each person in the room in turn. Margot had the same monotone smile she always wore and Morgan looked just as stunned, mouth slack and open. Alana, however, smiled kindly.

“We’d like to be considered as family,” Margot pressed.

“Margot and I care and want what’s best for you,” Alana swiftly added. “We would be happy to be there for you in any capacity you might need, Walter,” Alana answered sweetly. “If that be staying with us or helping find Will for you, we’ll help.”

Walter breathed in deeply with a nod. As much as he didn’t like being in this big house, as much as he hated how it felt to be crushed at this moment, he was grateful to Alana. For the first time since they had met, he was grateful to have someone as straightforward and upfront about everything as she was. He had resented her for so long for trying to, in his mind, step in place of his mother. Margot had been respectfully distant, but Alana had shoved herself so hard onto him that he had shoved back.

Walter felt a slight smile tug at his lips that was quickly dashed away with a skip of his heart. The dining room door was slammed open with a loud thud, but before Walter had a chance to look toward the sound, the sharp and abrupt crack of a gunshot sent Walter’s ears into a ringing mess.

His breath was stolen from his lungs as a wet, hot stickiness splattered over his face and when he was finally able to blink his eyes open again he was met with Alana’s body slumped over the back in her dinner chair, unmoving.

The air slammed back into Walter like a dumbbell, his lungs jolting into action painfully. He gasped, body shaking as his mind tried to wrap around what his eyes were seeing.

Not again! his head screamed at him as the collar of his shirt was tugged harshly and his body was pulled from his chair. *Please not again! I can’t do this again!*

“Move,” Margot’s voice ordered above a dog’s snarls and the cries of a man. Walter was shoved towards the door of the dining room, gaze tossed over his shoulder to look back at Applesauce’s jaw clamped down on a blonde man’s arm who was now in a game of tug of war against Applesauce with his own body parts. “Hurry.”

The hallway was dark compared to the dining room and Walter struggled to put it into perspective, but his feet knew where they were going. Towards the study. Towards Margot's personal room that was strictly for work, strictly not to be interred unless they absolutely needed something, like the day when Walter had warned her all of this would happen. Why hadn't they listened? *Why hadn't they just listened to him?!*

Walter was nearly thrown into the room and stumbled over his own feet, listening to the door being shut and locked. He turned to find Morgan's small frame simply there. There didn't seem to be anything within the body, it was void of all life. His face was as white as a sheet and his eyes were wide, his face covered in blood splatter like Walter's was.

Margot dug through her desk drawers, hands trembling as she pulled a gun from one of them. Walter watched curiously as she tried to load the magazine into it and couldn't with how badly her hands were shaking.

Why do I have to take care of everything? Walter asked himself as he stepped past Morgan and went to Margot. *Why do I have to be the calm one? Why do I have to fix everything? It's not fair!*

Walter took the gun from her hands and shoved the magazine into place with a click, flicking off the safety and cocking it before passing it back to her. She looked a tad confused and curious as she took the weapon from him, but Walter didn't have the chance to explain that Will had taken him shooting before. He had never been good at it, couldn't hit the right side of a barn because he anticipated the recoil too much, but he knew how to load a gun.

There was a crash against the door and the three of them jumped. Walter's shoulder was snatched up and he was shoved towards the back corner of the room where a liquor cabinet sat, the wood deep and dark. When they reached it, one of the two front doors was pulled open and Walter's knees buckled at the astonishing amount of strength in Margot's push on his shoulder.

"Get in there," she instructed in a hushed voice as another loud sound came from the door that was being rammed into, by what, Walter wasn't sure. He could only imagine a jagged, fractured log from the battle of Helm's Deep being used to break apart the flimsy wooden panel that kept them safe. "Do not come out. Do you understand?"

"What about-"

"Do as I'm telling you!" Margot ordered, voice more convicting.

Walter crawled into the cabinet, doing his best to push aside expensive-looking bottles to make room for his body without making a mess. He curled up the best he could and watched as the space around him went mostly dark as the door was shut. Or was attempted to be shut. It bounced back open enough to allow Walter a sliver of the room to be seen, though he didn't dare reach out and try to close it, too afraid that he would somehow break something if he tried. Shatter a bottle or knock the door off its hinges or whatnot. So he stayed perfectly still, body folded in on itself in a position that would surely start to ache sooner rather than later.

Morgan jumped at a hand on his shoulder, a small squeak leaving his lips as he looked back up at his mother. She guided him with a forceful grip towards the opposite direction that he had seen Walter go, though he hadn't been able to tear his eyes away from the door that had loud voices yelling from behind it.

"I want you to hide in the-" before Margot could finish the door splintered open and she froze.

Morgan stared, body frozen as the giant of a man raised his gun. His body was jerked to the side and he pressed his head into the back of Margot's dress, hands clutching the fabric tight enough to cause his fingers to go white.

Morgan had never understood the concept of slow-motion before. It had been described countless times in the books he had read, but his mind had never been able to grasp the idea until now. The gunshot that came was a dull thud that echoed around and Morgan knew that his mother's body falling could have only taken a matter of seconds, but it was like time had stretched on like pulled taffy.

The fabric of her summer dress was ripped from his fingers and Morgan stepped back to avoid his mother's tumble. She hit the floor, blue eyes staring blankly up at the ceiling. Red poured from her chest like a bubbling geyser and Morgan's knees went weak under him.

He dropped to the floor beside his mother and felt a sob rip through his throat. No words left him, he wasn't even sure if he knew what words were anymore. Wasn't sure if words would ever make sense to him again. First his mom and now his mother.

Is this how Walter had felt? So shattered and broken? Is that what Morgan felt? He didn't know. His thoughts were jumbled, a mess rolling about his head around one single concept. Both of his moms were dead.

A gentle touch caressed his cheek and Morgan did his best to focus his attention enough on what it was. His mother wore a bloody smile, those blue eyes shining as she brushed her thumb over his cheek. She coughed instead of breathed and Morgan's body felt hot all over. Like it wanted to run to the other side of the world, like it wanted to go after the man who had hurt his mother, like it wanted to explode into a million pieces because he wasn't sure he could contain all of the vibrating emotions roaming through him.

The touch left Morgan's cheek as Margot's hand dropped back to her side, her coughing persisting and causing her chest to convulse unnaturally. Morgan's hands shook as he reached out to touch. Maybe to help? He didn't know if he could, but he had to try.

His hands halted at a click and Morgan's eyes pulled from Margot to be met with the barrel of the man's gun close enough to make him go cross-eyed. His lungs kicked into overdrive as if the more oxygen he consumed the better chance at life he had and he stared at the same fate that had taken his mothers aimed at him.

Walter shimmied himself from the liquor cabinet, his knees weak and aching at the angle they had been shoved into. He didn't care how loud he was or what happened. All he knew was that he had to help. He had to save the stupid little boy who was good for nothing because that's what Alana and Margot would have wanted. Because Alana and Margot had done everything for Walter and he had to return the favor. He had to pay them back now before it was too late to do anything for them at all.

Walter tumbled to the ground and scrambled to his feet, running to the nearest bookshelf as his legs shook. He snatched up a bust of someone that he couldn't name and nearly dropped it at how heavy it was. His grip tightened onto the statue and he moved as quickly as he could towards a dark-haired man with his gun pointed directly at Morgan with his finger on the trigger.

There was a twitch in the man's hand and Walter threw the bust as hard as he could in the man's direction. It collided with the man's side, sending him to the ground, and the crack that filled the air collided with the floorboard beside Morgan's leg.

"Fuck," the man hissed as he tried to get back to his feet.

Walter raced past the man, jumping out of the way of snatching fingers. He picked up the gun that was in Margot's hand with an apologetic breath, meeting her dull blue eyes that blinked up at him as she continued to cough, her breath rattling in her chest.

Walter frowned and pulled his gaze from her and to the boy trembling on the floor. He grabbed the collar of Morgan's bloodied dress shirt and tugged him to his feet. "Come on," Walter ordered, hoping to have the same power in his voice that Margot had supplied to her, but he found it lacking. "Morgan, move!"

The boy tripped over his own feet as he staggered after Walter and towards the door of the study. Walter pushed Morgan out of the door and turned back just enough to catch a glimpse of a gun aimed at Margot's unmoving body.

"Go!" Walter ordered, turning his back to the room and shoving Morgan down the hallway. "Towards the front door."

A gunshot sent a chill through Walter, but he ignored the pained sound from Morgan's throat and continued to force the boy's body down the hallway. Walter could see the setting sun pouring through the windows of the front doors and he pressed Morgan forward.

Just get outside and then we can break down, Walter reasoned with himself. *Just get outside and then you're safe.* It was a lie, but it kept his feet moving. Kept him running. Kept his grip tight on the small boy beside him.

Walter flung the front door open and was about to hit the front steps before the gravel drive when a strong arm wrapped around him and nearly knocked the air from his lungs. Walter's anxiety peaked and he struggled against the grip, trying to aim the gun at whatever decided to cling to him. He had come too far to be taken now. He had tried too hard to be killed now. No stupid farmhand was going to screw anything else up for him.

"Wally," a voice called to him, something he was sure he recognized but was distorted enough that he still persisted to fight. "Wally, stop. Give me the gun."

Walter snapped as the voice finally supplied him with a name. "Dad," he gasped, body going weak against Will. Walter gasped, the breath painful as his eyes prickled with tears.

"Give me the gun," Will instructed once more, voice firm and calm as a warm hand covered Walter's. Walter's grip loosened on the gun and it was pulled from his hand before he was consumed up in a hug. "What's wrong?"

"Alana and Margot," Walter got out as hyperventilation set in. "Both-Both shot- both shot."

Walter was pushed back and worried eyes scanned him. "Calm down, Wally. Come on." A hand brushed his hair from his face. "Deep breath."

"I-I-I can't!" Walter stuttered out, his whole body feeling as if it were going to shake to pieces.

“Will,” an accented voice called and Walter couldn’t bring himself to feel the annoyance that Hannibal usually brought with him when the man knelt beside Will. “Look over Morgan for me.” Will gave a nod and released Walter who was quickly retaken up by Hannibal’s hands. Walter met dark maroon eyes that held more emotion in them than what Walter could compute. One of Hannibal’s hands pressed itself to Walter’s middle, just below his ribs. “Push against my hand with your breathing, Walter. Focus on moving my hand. Deep, slow breaths.” Walter shook his head, a sob racking through him. His cheek was taken up by Hannibal’s other hand and was caressed gently by Hannibal’s thumb. “Come on, Walter. I know you can do it.”

Walter inhaled deeply, his breath nearly cut off as it was forced back out against his will. But eventually, he was able to push against Hannibal’s hand, with a handful of breaths, his breathing returned to a normal pattern and he pulled from Hannibal’s grip.

“Men wanted to steal things from the house,” he explained, moving closer to where Will was, holding the pale Morgan in a hug. “Shot Alana and Margot. Still in the house. Don’t know what happened to Applesauce.”

Hannibal nodded and rose from his knees, back to his feet. Walter watched as the man, composed completely in his suit, pulled his suit coat from his body, tossing it to the porch steps. His vest and tie followed, left on the ground to be forgotten.

“Will,” Hannibal said in an instructional tone and Walter looked towards Will who wore a knowing look that Walter wished he didn’t understand. “We need to check on Margot and Alana.” Hannibal rolled up his sleeves to reveal his forearms and without another word, he stepped through the doors that Walter had forced Morgan out of.

Walter turned back to Will at movement and watched as, with Morgan still in his arms, Will stepped back into the house as well. Panic shot through Walter, starting his heart back up at an alarming speed. He raced after his dad and immediately clutched on Will’s arm, nearly causing the man to drop Morgan.

Will straightened himself up without a scolding towards Walter and Walter soon found himself stopped in front of a closet door. He glanced around and found the space void of Hannibal and wondered where the man had disappeared to, but the closet door opening pulled Walter’s attention back to Will.

“In here,” Will instructed, setting Morgan back down on his feet. “Go all the way to the back, behind the coats. Make sure the shoes are in front of your legs.”

“Dad,” Walter whimpered, though he wasn’t exactly sure what he meant by the word.

Will’s expression was soft and sad as the man knelt to Walter’s height. “We’re going to take care of things here and then we will leave just like I promised,” Will explained in a whisper. “You’ve been so good for me, Wally. Just be strong but a bit longer. Do not leave this closet until I come and get you. Do not make noise. Do you understand?”

“But Dad, I-”

“Shh,” Will instructed with a sorrowful smile. “Morgan needs you, alright? Be good. Come on.”

A loud crash caused Walter’s heart and body to jump and gave Will enough of a chance to shove both Morgan and Walter into the closet, shutting the door. Walter blinked through the sudden darkness and it took a moment for the words to finally sink in. He reached out blindly until he found a shivering form and pushed Morgan further into the closet. He pushed through winter coats and blazers, jackets and sweaters, tripping over boots and whatever else was in the space. It went on for what felt like hours without a back and Walter if he weren't so tongue-tied from the situation, might have made a joke about finding Narnia.

"Wally?" Morgan's voice muttered when they finally hit the back of the closet.

"Shh," Walter ordered, turning around to make sure they were fully covered just as Will had instructed.

"Wally."

"Shut up."

"Wally."

"I said shut up!" Walter hissed through his teeth, once more blinking through the darkness in some hope that he would be able to see, but coming up completely empty. There was muted thudding and Morgan let out a sob. Walter reached out, clamping a hand down over Morgan's mouth. "I fucking mean it. Shut up."

Morgan's breath was wet and hot against Walter's hand as tears began to cover his fingers. Walter closed his eyes and licked at his lips as several more thuds from somewhere else in the house. And then it fell silent. Completely still.

Walter's eyes shut tightly and he was certain that his grip on Morgan was borderline painful, but he couldn't loosen his grip. Morgan had to be quiet. Walter would keep Morgan quiet if it were the very last thing he ever did.

The footsteps were so loud they might as well have been in the closet with them. They were distant, but each one matched with the tick of Walter's heart, and Walter did his best to steady his breathing so he didn't throw up. His mouth was filling with saliva and the backs of his jaw were beginning to tingle as if he had just eaten something sour.

And then they did get closer. Right outside the door. Back and forth. A single pair. Back and forth and back and forth and back and forth. Were they pacing? No. The footsteps would disappear back into the house and then outside before returning. What were they doing? What did they want?

Morgan was a trembling wreck, barely on his feet. Walter held the boy upright, his own knees ready to give out under him and his breathing halted when the feet did too. Right outside of the closet.

The sound of the door handle turning caused Walter to push Morgan further into the closet, up against the back wall until Walter's body covered Morgan's completely. He was going to be sick. If the person left, Walter was going to throw up.

Is this what it felt like to be in a school shooting? Walter had been on lockdowns before, but for things like a cougar walking around town or a teenager jumping a fence and trespassing, but even then he had never felt a real sense of danger.

Was this what it felt like to wait to be killed? Even with Jordan and Casey, Walter had never felt a real form of jeopardy. Casey had promised that he wouldn't be hurt. Promised that he could play with Danny when everything was over and Walter had believed... Willingly believed. He had just believed because it was easier than facing the truth, but now he couldn't hide. Now he couldn't escape behind comforting words.

Now all there was, was the clicking of the door handle and then the door being pulled open. Walter's heart stopped as did his breathing as he waited for his two options to play out. What had God decided to bless him with? What had fate chosen for him? Had she cut his life string or had the scissors broken?

"Wally, Morgan. Come on," came a gentle voice. "It's time to go."

"Dad," Walter gasped, locked in position as the jackets were pushed out of the way. Large, warm hands took his shoulders and soothed them out, the tension released enough to make Walter want to collapse. He was pulled away from Morgan and into Will's body. "I don't want to see anymore. Please," Walter begged into Will's chest.

"You were so brave, Wally," Will quieted, petting the boy's hair. "I'm proud of you. I need you to be strong just a little longer."

"I'm tired."

"I know," Will assured with a nod. "I know." Will pushed Walter back to look over the boy's blood speckled face. Those once golden eyes were a dark pool of molasses and Will frowned. "You don't have to see anymore. Hannibal is going to help you out of the car. I'm going to get Morgan. Alright?"

Will manipulated Walter's body over to Hannibal who stood beside him and Hannibal didn't hesitate to scoop up the boy who immediately clung to Hannibal with his arms and legs around the man's middle. Hannibal turned for the door and Will watched him leave before he turned to Morgan who was shaking like a leaf.

"Morgan," Will called, a hand outstretched to the boy. "Come here. It's time to go."

"Where?" Morgan choked out, the tears still streaming down his face, making a path through all of the blood on his cheeks. Before Will could answer, Morgan pushed on, his wide blue eyes darting around behind Will. "My moms, are they...? Where are they, Will?"

Will's heart shattered into a thousand pieces and he licked his lips as he tried to come up with an answer. "Morgan, Hannibal and I are going to take care of you now, alright? We're going to take you somewhere safe where no one will hurt you again."

"I want my moms."

Will shushed the sob as he stepped forward and snatched the boy from the closet and into his arms. He held Morgan's face against his shoulder as the boy screamed. His breath dampened Will's shirt with wet heat.

Will stepped outside, leaving the house behind him, not bothering to close the door. There wasn't a reason to. Not when the only living things were leaving. Hannibal closed the back car door and turned around, rubbing at one of his split knuckles with a deep breath. He caught Will's gaze and gave a silent nod.

Will climbed into the car, Morgan still held tightly in his lap. The boy continued to cry loudly, voice muffled against Will's body. Will played with the boy's hair in an attempt to comfort him, while he pulled down the visor and aimed the mirror towards the back seat so he could keep an eye on Walter who was staring blankly out of the window, his head against the glass.

The driver's side door opened and closed and Hannibal started the car up before pulling away, the car tires crunching up the gravel drive. Will gave a pained smile as he watched Hannibal adjust his rearview mirror to an angle to better see Walter as well.

"We stop long enough to get cleaned up and then we're going to the airport. Chiyoh will be waiting there for us with a private plane," Hannibal explained in a soft tone that was barely loud enough to be heard over Morgan. "We shouldn't be disturbed."

"We should let them-"

"Will, we can't buy any more time. We need to leave now before it's too late for us to."

Will fell silent, leaning back in his seat with a nod. He knew Hannibal was right, but that didn't change the fact that the boys needed the time. Needed the space to process. If anyone understood that, it would be Hannibal.

* * *

Will carried the sleeping Morgan into the motel room and rested the boy on one of the two beds. When Morgan was settled and still fast asleep, Will turned back to Walter who had wandered numbly into the room, guided by Hannibal's hand.

"Wally, listen to me." Will moved over and took Walter's chin to pull the boy's face up to make eye contact. "Hannibal and I are going to run to the store to get some food and some supplies for you to get cleaned up. I need you to stay here and be with Morgan. Do not open this door for anyone. Do not leave this room. Do not let Morgan out of your sight. Lock the door when we leave. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Walter whispered.

"Try to get some rest." Will leaned over and pressed a kiss to Walter's head before heading to the door. "We should only be there for a few minutes."

"Kay."

Will frowned and closed his eyes with a deep breath. A hand took his shoulder with a squeeze and Will let himself be led from the room that was locked behind them just as instructed. Guilt flowed through him on a never-ending cycle as he climbed back into the car.

"Should one of us-"

"You know your son better than me, Will. I have no idea what would help comfort him at the moment. He wouldn't want me to stay with him," Hannibal reminded kindly as he started the car. "You can stay if you would like to."

Will stared at the motel door for a moment in silence before he shook his head. “No. Let’s go.”

The trip was silent. They worked their way through the nearest gas station, grabbing medical supplies in case one of the boys had been hurt and they hadn’t been able to tell, and then some food and water.

They were heading to the checkout when Will’s gaze caught some stupidly overpriced display. His head tipped to the side curiously as he stepped closer to it. He could feel Hannibal’s eyes digging into his back to tell him that they needed to hurry, but he ignored it. Will snatched up a Rubik’s cube. Something to help distract Walter. Walter enjoyed puzzles and Will knew that thinking about colored boxes would help more than thinking about what had happened.

Will’s hand reached out once more, but he stopped, biting his bottom lip, truly unsure what Morgan would like. But he picked up a tan bunny with long, floppy ears, hoping it would help. It wouldn’t solve anything, Will doubted it would do anything at all, but at least the thought was there, he supposed.

When they arrived back at the motel room, the door clicked as it was unlocked and a tired-looking Walter answered the door, rubbing one of his eyes with a yawn. He stepped out of the way and Will glanced around the room. Morgan was still fast asleep in the bed, which was for the best. The rest of the room looked untouched, save for the chair at the table turned towards the door that Walter must have been sitting in, waiting for them to return.

“Wally, go shower please,” Will instructed as he passed a bag of hygiene products to Walter. “I’ll have something for you to eat when you get out.”

“I’ll grab some clothes from the car for you,” Hannibal added from behind Will. Will could see the flicker of Walter’s eyes to Hannibal for no more than a minute, but the dislike was clear in them, though no words came from the boy. He simply nodded and went to the bathroom with the bag. “I’ll be right back,” Hannibal whispered, pressing a kiss to Will’s head before leaving the room.

Will sighed and set the shopping down on the table, sitting in the chair that Walter had abandoned. He dug through the bag and pulled out the several cup-of-noodles that they had gotten to eat and opened one up to get it in the microwave for Walter. Once that was going, Will returned to the bag, pulling out the toys he had gotten for the kids, opening the packaging of Walter’s Rubik’s cube, and setting it out on the table for Walter when he was done with his shower, which was now finally running.

The rabbit was set beside the Rubik’s cube and Will sighed, rubbing at the stumble across his chin. The door opened and Will sat up a bit straighter in his chair as Hannibal reentered the room with Morgan and Walter’s bags in tow.

They were set aside and then a hand caressed over Will’s shoulder, massaging into it. A kiss was pressed to his temple and Will closed his eyes, a hand taking Hannibal’s at his shoulder.

“Stop thinking so hard,” Hannibal instructed in a whisper. “We’re doing the right thing. He couldn’t be left alone.”

“He has to have other family members, right?” Will asked, sighing and tipping his head back as more light kisses were pressed over his cheek. “Maybe we should-”

“This is what Alana wanted, Will. You were there.”

“She couldn’t speak. What if she-what it-”

“Will,” Hannibal pressed, nuzzling his nose against Will’s. “Your mind no longer needs to fight against you. Everything is going to be ok. We’re going to take care of them. Both boys, just as if they were our own.”

Will pressed forward and received a kiss on his lips. “They won’t stop hunting us. Even if the plan that Jack set in place actually could have worked, they won’t use it now. We’ll never be able to stop. We’ll never-”

“They’ll understand.” Hannibal pulled away and straightened up, though his hand stayed on Will’s shoulder, still rubbing into it soothingly. Will’s grip tightened on Hannibal’s hand.

“And when they catch up with us, because they will, what about the boys? What happens to them?” Will glanced over to Morgan who was still asleep in the bed, blood-covered with a deep and unsettled crease in his brow.

“We’ll guide them.” Will’s eyes met Hannibal’s in confusion, his chest tightening at the idea that Hannibal was putting forth. “Teach them how to protect themselves.”

Will shook his head and licked his lips, pushing Hannibal’s hand away as he rose from his chair, arms folded over his chest. “No,” he fought sternly with a shake of his head. “Absolutely not. I am not turning these boys into-”

“Into what Will?” Hannibal questioned, the hint of amusement in his tone enough to cause Will to grit his teeth. “I don’t intend to make them killers. You would think that lowly of me?”

“You did that to Abigail.” The accusation from his own lips turned Will sober and he quickly turned to face Hannibal who simply had his hands in his dress pants pockets with a patiently waiting and curiously listening lift to his brows. “I-I didn’t...” Will exhaled sharply through his nose and his eyes dropped to the flow furiously. “I don’t want another Abigail, Hannibal.”

“They will not be another Abigail, nor will they be killers, Will,” Hannibal assured kindly as he stepped closer to Will. When his shoes came into view, Will finally looked up. “We will provide them with the tools to protect themselves, nothing more. What they decide to do with said tools is their prerogative.”

“You promise me, Hannibal,” Will begged, though his voice stayed strong. One of his index fingers pressed into Hannibal’s chest as he spoke. “You promise me right now that these children will not become like us. You promise me that your hobbies and proclivities will not be done anywhere near them. I don’t care if you want to kill, I don’t care if you still want to cook after a kill, I don’t care if you want me to join you, but I do care about what they know. Promise me right now, Hannibal.”

“I promise, dear Will.” Hannibal’s hands reached up and slowly encircled Will’s hand, pulling it to his mouth to kiss. “Our personal activities will be kept away from the children and what we provide for them will not transform them into the monsters we are.”

Will opened his mouth to speak, but the sound of the bathroom door opening cut him off. Walter stepped out, hair dripping, with a towel around his waist. Hannibal moved back to the bags and picked up Walter’s lonely backpack, holding it out to the boy. Walter said nothing, simply took the pack and set it on the bed to dig through it.

“Once Morgan’s clean and they’ve both eaten, we need to leave,” Hannibal informed Will as he went over to the bed Morgan was in. “They can sleep on the plane.”

“Plane?” Walter finally spoke up, his hands stopped and his eyes met Hannibal straight on. “Where are we going?”

“Amsterdam first,” Hannibal supplied simply as he shook Morgan awake. “Then to Germany after we’ve rested and have the necessary paperwork for the two of you.”

“Germany?” Walter inhaled deeply and gave an accepting nod. “Right.” He finished digging out his clothes and set them aside. “What’s for dinner?”

Will took that as a cue to snap out of his worried haze and to get to work as an adult. He made his way to the microwave and opened it, pulling the cup of noodle from it, setting the steaming styrofoam on the table.

Morgan groaned and whimpered as Hannibal pulled him from the bed. “We need to clean you up,” Hannibal explained at the small child’s protests. “Then you can eat.”

“No water,” Morgan whined, hiding his face in Hannibal’s shoulder when Hannibal scooped him up. “Please.”

“You need to shower, Morgan,” Hannibal pressed and Will bit his lip, staying silent, unsure of how exactly to help. How long would Morgan stay afraid of water? Would bathing always be an issue? Would the boy finally snap out of it one day? Just one challenge to add to the list of them to solve. “I’ll be there. Nothing is going to hurt you,” Hannibal assured, as he grabbed Morgan’s bag with his free hand and retreated into the bathroom, closing the door behind them.

Will didn’t dare speak as Walter got dressed, but he did take a seat at the table when Walter sat to begin eating with a sad plastic fork that Will provided him. “Here,” Will muttered, pushing the Rubik’s cube over to Walter. Walter’s eyes lit up slightly and he quickly shoved a mouthful of dripping noodles into his mouth before snatching up the game and messing with it. “I thought it would help.”

“Thanks,” Walter said through his mouthful. He swallowed and blindly reached for another bite before his attention landed on the other item on the table. “What’s that?” Walter reached out and snatched up the bunny and Will inhaled deeply with a small shake of his head.

“It was for Morgan,’ was Will’s answer.

“Was?”

“Wasn’t thinking straight. Thinking better of it now.” Will reached out to try to take the rabbit from Walter’s hand, but Walter moved it from Will’s reach. “Wally, give it back. I was upset when I bought it. Maybe still am.”

“Stop thinking better of it. Give it to Morgan.” Walter turned the rabbit this way and that, the ears flopping every which way. “He’ll need something to hold onto and I don’t want it to be me.” The bunny was placed back on the table and Walter returned to his food, slurping it up loudly. There was sobbing from the bathroom that pulled their attention for a moment, Walter was swifter to turn away than Will. “Morgan’s scared of the water. He cried every time Margot or Alana made him bathe.”

Will exhaled deeply with a nod, settling back in his chair, rubbing at his tired eyes. “How are you doing, Wally? Are you alright?”

“Alright?” Walter snorted around another mouthful.

“Bad choice of words.”

“You think?” Will was surprised to find a teasing smile over Walter’s face, the oddness of Walter’s calmness not missed. Walter was always so calm. After everything, how did he stay put together? How did he stay strong? Will knew there were dark things in Walter’s past. He had felt them from time to time, picked them out in the way that Walter sometimes acted or didn’t act, but the way this child stood against the claws of death as they continued to snatch at him... unnerved Will. “I’m not alright. Doubt I’ll ever be alright again,” Walter pressed on, picking up the cup to finish off the broth at the bottom of it. “But I’m still alive, so I need to act like it, don’t I?”

Will watched the boy finish off the barely passable soup before Wally picked up the cube and began to mess with it again, both ignoring another cry from the bathroom. The room fell into silence as Will watched Walter solve the cube only to pass it to Will, who would mess it up for Walter to solve once more.

The shower turned off and Will got to his feet to make Morgan a cup-of-noodles as well.

The last time that Will had seen Chiyo, she had shoved him from the back of a train. That night had not gone the way he had hoped it would have. Where he had wanted it to go, he hadn’t been exactly sure, but with his face battered and bruised and a limp in his step was not it.

She had been present in his life after that point. He had a decent-sized scar on his shoulder from one of her bullets. And he could recall a good portion of Muskrat Farm. There had been gunshots on a cold snowy night and then a car that was not driven by Hannibal. His hair had been played within the back of the car until sleep had finally come for Will. Both of those incidents belonged to Chiyoh, though he had no specific evidence to point towards it.

Now she stood on the apron, looking a little more or less annoyed. Still as beautiful and perfect as that night they had kissed. Still as strong and loyal as she had been since Mischa had died. Still cold and soft-toned, but not soft-spoken.

“Who is that, Dad?” Walter asked from Will’s side as they walked up to the woman.

“An old friend,” Will answered back softly, ruffling Walter’s hair. Ahead of them, Hannibal strode, Morgan held tightly in his arms, the boy having yet to stop crying since he had been woken in the motel room. “She’ll help get us to Amsterdam safely.”

“You trust her?”

Will glanced down at his son who was staring up at him, curiously and Will frowned with a shake of his head, the truth leaving him before he could pull it back. “Not in the slightest.”

“But Hannibal does,” Walter decided firmly. “Why don’t you?”

“I’ll explain when you’re older.”

Walter rolled his eyes at the answer but didn't say a word more. The four of them came to stop in front of the woman. Chiyoh looked over them for a moment, head tipping to the side in interest, eyes lingering on the children a little longer than what was probably necessary.

"This way," was all she said, turning on her heel and leading the way through the apron, her boots clicking against the concrete. The four followed after her, Will hanging back just slightly, truly unsure of where they stood, but Walter didn't seem at all bothered by her. He raced up beside her and she gleaned down at him when he came into view.

"You're really pretty," Walter said sweetly.

"Thank you," she replied in her soft tone that reminded Walter a bit of the way Margot spoke.

"Are you coming with us?"

"I'm flying the plane."

"Can I watch?"

"Walter," Will hissed, jogging up to snatch up the boy's shoulder. "Stop." Will nearly froze when he was met with those same dark eyes that he distrusted wholeheartedly now. "Leave her alone."

"He's welcome to be curious, Will," Chiyoh stated simply before continuing on her way without another word.

"Relax," Hannibal instructed from beside Will. "I trust her with my life. We'll be perfectly safe."

"Right," Will grumbled, guiding Walter to follow after the woman.

The plane was bigger than Will thought it would be, but they all fit pleasantly within it. Walter made himself at home, spread fully across the couch with the Rubik's cube in his hand. Will found himself at the bar, pouring himself a whiskey and when he turned back around, Hannibal was in a chair with Morgan on his lap, whispering to the boy in a language that Will couldn't understand.

Will took a deep swallow of his whiskey and watched as two men loaded their luggage in what Will assumed was a back bedroom of some sort, though Will stopped one of them to take his backpack. He set it on another chair and opened it, pulling the stuffed animal from it with a nervous hand.

He walked over to where Hannibal was sitting and knelt beside the chair. "Morgan," he said softly, calling bloodshot and puffy eyes to his face. "I got this for you." Will held out the rabbit and Morgan's crying stilled for a breath or two before his small hand reached out and snatched it up. He clutched it to his chest, his tears starting once more as he hid back against Hannibal.

"Thank you," came out in a muffled tone.

"You're welcome," Will replied before getting to his feet to take his seat.

"Baby," Walter grumbled with a roll of his eyes. "I didn't cry."

"Kiekvienas žmogus skirtingai reaguoja į skausmą. Būtų gerai, kad tu tylėtum," Hannibal said to Walter before Will could scold him and Walter's eyes were wide.

"Yes, sir," he muttered, settling back into the couch with a pout, playing with his toy again.

Will gave Hannibal a confused look and Hannibal simply shook his head in answer, before turning his attention back to Morgan to continue in whatever he had been saying in what Will guessed was German.

Will had finished his drink and retrieved another by the time the plane finally took off. The only sound above the engines was Morgan who continued to cry and who could blame the boy? How could anyone be upset with a child who had just had his entire world ripped from him? Will just prayed that what they were doing was the right thing, that they weren't permanently damaging Morgan.

"Morgan," Walter finally said in exasperation, his temper having always been a bit short.

"Walter," Will warned, but Walter ignored him.

"Morgan, come here."

Morgan stiffened momentarily before obeying the older boy's order. He slumped from Hannibal's lap and made his way over to the couch where Walter had made enough room for Morgan to sit.

Morgan sniffled, bunny trapped to his chest with one arm, the other rubbing at his running nose.

Walter held out the solved Rubik's cube and Morgan took it with a confused expression.

"Fuck it up," Walter instructed, noticing the way that his dad smiled and the way that Hannibal cleared his throat in disapproval.

Morgan turned the cube around in his hand, looking over it for a good long minute before he seemed to grasp how the device worked. He twisted and turned it, the clicking creating a gentle atmosphere around them.

Morgan, once satisfied, passed it back to Walter who set to work solving the mess the kid had created. Morgan watched as he continued to sniffle and wipe at his nose and eyes while Walter solved the cube before passing it back to Morgan again.

Morgan moved a bit closer to Walter now and Walter did his best to ignore the way the kid leaned up against him, almost using Walter as a pillow. "Do you remember what you told me when I lost my mom?" Walter asked in a whisper, looking up to both of the men on the plane to find Hannibal staring out of a window, hand rubbing at his chin and Will busy getting another drink from the bar.

"No," Morgan answered in a thick, barely audible voice, eyes on the cube as he turned it this way and that in an attempt to thwart Walter's puzzle-solving capabilities.

"You told me that I could stay with you and that you wouldn't give up on me." Morgan's eyes flashed as he met Walter's. "My Dad and Hannibal will never be your moms, but they will be good to us." Walter wasn't sure if it was a lie, but anything to keep the boy from crying again. He also wasn't sure what made him say his next words, but there was truth in them. "And I'll be with you."

"Is Hannibal your Father?"

"No," Walter answered in a bitter whisper. "If you knew..." Walter trailed off, eyes once more dancing between the two men and though when he found eyes on him, he wasn't necessarily uncomfortable, just knew that maybe while in an enclosed space that he shouldn't speak badly about Hannibal in front of the man himself.

"Knew what?" Morgan asked curiously, happily taking back the once more solved cube.

"Nothing kid." Walter ruffled Morgan's hair. "We'll be alright."

"I miss them, Wally." There was another cry and the Rubik's cube fell from Morgan's hand before Morgan collapsed and his head landed in Walter's lap. Walter didn't miss the way that both men straightened up, as if ready to come help if called to it. Morgan hugged the bunny closer to his chest and Walter hesitated, unsure of what exactly to do until he remembered seeing Margot doing something for Morgan. "I want them back!"

Walter rolled his eyes and pulled at one of Morgan's shoulders until the boy was turned into a position that allowed Water to run his finger up and down the bridge of Morgan's nose. The boy's crying stuttered and faltered and eventually puttered out, Morgan having finally fallen back to sleep across Walter's lap.

"What?" Walter shot at Hannibal when the burn of the man's dark eyes became too much. He met Hannibal's gaze head-on and Hannibal simply shook his head.

"You're very kind, Walter."

"It's Wally," the boy grumbled, turning to look over at Will who had his head tiredly supported on the palm of his hand. "Dad, please tell Hannibal-" Walter broke off at a deep sigh from Will and Will rose to his feet, stepping into the space between his son and husband.

"Let's get this out now, alright?" Will asked, feeling a bit more steady addressing this than he thought he would be. "You two don't like each other and that's fine. You don't have to. I don't expect you to, but we're a family now and I expect you to both treat each other with respect at the very least." He looked from his pouting son to a much more composed Hannibal.

"Will is exactly right, Walter," Hannibal said in agreement, leaning forward in his chair to catch the attention of the boy. "I like you very much, I just do not approve of the ways in which you choose to express yourself." Walter's nose scrunched up in dislike and Will didn't miss the micro smile on Hannibal's lips. "Walter, you should feel my respect and I assure you, young man, you have it."

"Really?" Walter asked in disbelief, his face relaxing into something a bit more shocked. "Bullshit."

"I hope that in due time you will not doubt me." Hannibal got to his feet and stepped closer to Will, an arm wrapping around Will's waist to pull Will closer. He pressed a kiss to the empath's head and Will did his best not to squirm away from the public display of affection that he was certain Walter wouldn't appreciate. "But as your dad said, now we are a family, and our dynamic needs to be as such in public. How we conduct ourselves behind closed doors is another matter entirely, but for the safety of all of us, you and Morgan included, please refer to us as your parents."

"It has to be real." Walter looked down at the floor of the plane and gave a reluctant nod in understanding. "I would prefer sir if you don't mind. You're not my father."

"That is perfectly fine." Hannibal nodded. Walter frowned as another kiss was given to Will's head. " *Ketinu užsitarnauti teisę būti tavo tėvu.* "

“Fat chance.”

“Wally, please,” Will begged, turning to his son and lowering himself to his knees. He reached out and took Walter’s cheek in his hand. “Please. I know we can make this work. I know it’s going to be hard and there are going to be challenges, but please try. For me?”

Walter frowned and his nose scrunched up in dislike. “Fine,” he grumbled. “But if it doesn’t work, you have to promise me that something will change.”

Will nodded in answer, thumb brushing over his son’s cheek. “Of course. We’ll discuss it. You’re always welcome to come to me with anything, Wally. That will never change. Nothing between the two of us has to change. Do you understand?”

“Yes. But he has to pull his weight too.”

“I will, Walter,” Hannibal assured. “This won’t be a one-way effort on your part.”

“Promise,” Walter instructed, eyes tight on Hannibal over Will’s shoulder. “You care too much to break a promise.”

“I promise,” was answered after a breath of amusement in the air.

Will pressed a kiss to Walter’s head. “Try to get some rest. We have quite a few more hours before we land.” Will leaned in closer so he could whisper in Walter’s ear. “Thank you. I know I’m being selfish and asking a lot. Nothing will come between us, though. And please tell me if he ever says or does anything to you that is inappropriate or hurtful. Always be honest with me about everything, ok?” Will pulled back to find Walter’s golden eyes wide. Walter’s nod was almost nonexistent, but still there. Will smiled at Walter before pushing himself from his knees. “Are we in agreement?”

“Yes,” Walter whispered.

“Yes.” Hannibal inhaled deeply with a nod.

The hours ticked by in absolute silence, Will finishing off a few more drinks so his system was a bit more relaxed as visions of Alana and Margot flashed across his mind’s eye, curious about how much the boys had actually seen and what they hadn’t.

“You look troubled, dear boy.”

Will jumped at the voice and inhaled deeply from his dissociation, straightening himself up in his chair that had made his body incredibly stiff. Hannibal was standing in front of him with a concerned tilt to his lips.

Will rubbed at his eyes that were dry and hot from having not been blinking and when he opened them again, he looked over at the two boys who were asleep on the couch, Morgan still in Walter’s lap, clutching the bunny and Walter with his head tossed back against the couch.

“Just trying to put all of our ducks in a row, I suppose,” Will muttered, placing a smile over his lips to meet Hannibal’s gaze again. “What are we doing Hannibal? This is the most ridiculous idea the two of us have ever had. How do we-”

“One day at a time, Will.” Hannibal lowered himself beside Will’s chair and took Will’s hand with a gentle squeeze. “We take it one day at a time and learn how to live with each other.”

“Do you think Morgan understands?” Will frowned and tried to rub it away with his free hand. “I just want them to both be happy. Both have as normal of a life as we can give them. They deserve a future that’s safe, Hannibal.”

“And we will give it to them.” Hannibal’s tone was firm, though it didn’t move Will into a zone of comfort and Will was curious if he would ever feel comfortable again. If he would ever be at ease. “I think we should keep them close to us for the first little while.”

“How do you mean?”

“We should homeschool them while we learn how to manage each other. They need to be settled a bit more before we shove them out into the world.”

Will gave a nervous laugh and shook his head. “You want us to teach them? Hannibal, have you taken a good look at us lately? I might have been a teacher, but that doesn’t mean that I-”

“I can teach them,” Hannibal offered innocently and Will gave another burst of laughter until he realized the seriousness in Hannibal’s brow.

“You’re going to teach them? You’re going to teach them English and history and math and science and whatever the hell else they will need to learn?”

Hannibal’s head tipped to the side in mock curiosity. “Between the two of us, I am more than positive that we could manage. Will, you seem to forget that you were at the top of your classes all through school as was I. Different classes and majors, but we can navigate the waters just fine. And it won’t be forever. If they would prefer to go to school, I do not mind letting them attend a private school.”

“I’m still shocked at how serious you are about all of this,” Will said in exasperation, shaking his head. “You mean it?”

“Absolutely. Why wouldn’t I?”

“I...” Will sighed. “I don’t mean to keep bringing it up, but I don’t-”

“This will not be another Abigail, Will. I promise you.”

The plane landed and Will found himself in a sweet little cottage on the edge of town, Chiyoh leaving them with hushed whispers to Hannibal and a nod to Will who promptly returned it as the woman left the house, both children waving goodbye to her.

“She has a little boy now named Mikhail,” Hannibal explained softly as he went about the small house to check it over through the late afternoon sun. “I’m going to turn on the breakers and get the water going if you want to let the boys settle in.”

“Alright,” Will agreed, catching Hannibal’s hand as the killer passed him. Hannibal paused and looked back at Will, kissing Will’s cheek before stepping out of the house to take care of whatever he was going to take care of. “Alright, boys. How about we explore. Find a room for the two of you. We’ll probably be here for a week or two.”

Both boys who looked jet-lagged with messy hair nodded and they wandered their way through the house until both had their bedrooms picked out and Will went about pulling off the protective cloth from the furniture. By the time the living room and dining room were more or less put together, Hannibal had wandered back into the house.

“Everything should be working. It might take some time for the water heater to heat up though,” he explained with a small smile. “I’m going to run into town and get some groceries. I’ll only be half an hour.”

“Alright,” Will said with a nod, glancing around at the decent-sized cottage that felt a bit colder than he wanted it to. He inhaled deeply and folded his arms over his chest, curious if he would have felt the same feeling of being eaten up inside if they had run away with Abigail when they had the chance so long ago. “I love you.”

“I love you too.” Will jumped as a pair of hands took his hips from behind and a nose nuzzled against his neck. “It’s ok Will. We’re safe here. You believe me, don’t you?”

“Yes. Of course.” Will shivered as a kiss was placed on his pulse. “I’m sorry. This is exactly what we had planned the whole time. I just need to....” Will shrugged and Hannibal sighed, breath warm against Will’s neck.

“I understand, Will. It’s a big step, but isn’t this what we’ve always wanted? Since the beginning haven’t we wanted a family together somewhere where we could be ourselves?”

Will’s tongue felt tied with the answer. Yes. Since the absolute beginning that had been their goal, unspoken, but clear as day. Even before Will admitted he felt anything for the therapist, they were trying to create their own broken little family. So why did it feel so off now that they had it?

“Hannibal, I just...” Will stepped out of Hannibal’s grasp and turned to face the man who was patiently waiting for the rest of Will’s sentence. “I feel like the world’s ended right in front of me.” Hannibal’s brows rose as he listened. “It fell apart and shook beneath our feet. Buildings disintegrated, crumbled, and took people close to us with them. And I feel like it’s my fault, like I started the end.”

“Will,” Hannibal scolded in a gentle tone, reaching out to brush his fingers through Will’s curls. Will inhaled deeply and leaned into the touch with eyes flickering closed. “You do not have to play savior or destructor. We did what we could. There was nothing we could have done.”

“If we didn’t keep coming to them then-”

“Then nothing. Those men were their employees. Us being there saved those two boys, Will,” Hannibal reasoned in a kind voice. “As strong, brave, and smart as Walter is, and he is, those two boys wouldn’t have made it out of there alive without us.”

“But if we came earlier or if we-”

“Will.” Hannibal pulled Will closer, resting his forehead to the empath’s. “What if’s are not going to change what happened. There is no use having anxiety over the past. We need to focus on the future, alright?” Will licked his lips with a small nod. “We have to focus on giving those two boys all of the support they need to survive in this life. That is what is important at this moment in time."

"Right." Will sighed. "You're right."

"I'll be back in half an hour." Will pushed up on his toes and kissed Hannibal, causing the cannibal to give a smile when Will pulled away. "We'll figure this out." Hannibal stepped away from Will and went for the front door.

Will closed his eyes tightly with a steadying inhale and turned back to the kitchen, glancing around at the spacious room. His eyes landed on the stairs where both of the boys were standing and watching him, Walter looking a little annoyed and Morgan still clutching the bunny to his chest with one arm, the other hand firmly clutched to Walter's.

"Let's see," Will said as he stepped around the table and came to the stairs. "What can we do to have a bit of fun?"

"I don't feel like having fun," Morgan muttered, hiding his face in the bunny.

Will forced a smile to his lips despite the way he felt like he was failing the child. He knelt to Morgan's height and looked over the small boy. "What would you like to do?"

Morgan was silent as he glanced around the room and gave a shrug. "Go outside?"

"Ok. Let's go outside." Will got back to his feet and held out his hand that Morgan slowly took, releasing Walter, much to Walter's relief. "You too, Wally. We've been cooped up long enough."

The three wandered out into the mild sunshine and Will finally took a good long look at the cottage. It didn't strike Will as very Hannibal. He hadn't thought that Hannibal would have ripped a home right from a fairytale book, but that's what it was like. Old stones and large windows with giant wood panels. The front flower beds were starting to sprout what he guessed were tulips and he found himself eagerly awaiting what color they would be. Ivy was climbing up one side of the house and he wasn't sure how he missed the light sound of running water.

The boys had gravitated to the sound and Will followed after them, looking over a small stream that was crystal clear and tumbling over rocks. Morgan had taken a step back and behind Walter who had easily lowered himself to the side of the creek to stick his fingers in it, only to pull them out quickly.

"Cold," he laughed, the smile across his lips real, much to Will's surprise. "Do you think it gets bigger somewhere and we can go fishing?" Those golden eyes danced as they met Will.

"Pick a direction and let's find out," Will offered with a shrug, shoving his hands into his pants pockets.

"That way!" Morgan said, pointing up and behind the house towards where a wall of trees waited for them. Both boys raced off up the creekside and through grass that was soon going to be much taller than them. Will chased after them at a light jog as they ran.

Will wasn't sure if it was a good enough distraction, but it seemed to be working. At least they weren't silent and moody and moping about. They had grins on their face as they explored their new surroundings and the guilt that had clung to Will's ribs with a barbed grip was finally starting to dissipate.

Time ticked by far too quickly and soon Will was calling the boys back and towards the house, no larger body of water having been found as of yet, but the following days held promise. The sun was starting to set, dusting the sky in a deep rich blue and fire-like oranges.

The lights in the cottage were on and smoke was dancing lazily from the chimney, only casting a much more fairytale-esque picture over the whole scene. In one of the large open windows, Will could see Hannibal messing about the kitchen and his soul seemed to melt at the idea of this becoming their new normal. Bringing the boys home from playing to dinner made by a man he loved more deeply than he had ever thought possible to love another human being.

Will held the front door open and the boys stepped inside, tracking in dirt from their shoes, but Will didn't say anything. The floors could get dirty so long as the boys didn't stop smiling. Dirty floors weren't that big of an issue. There was bound to be a broom and dustpan somewhere.

"Go wash up you two," Will instructed and Morgan and Walter raced off for the stairs, their footsteps thudding loudly up them. Will smiled lightly and stepped into the kitchen, being greeted with a glass of wine held out to him. He took it and gave a long inhale before lightly sipping on the contents of the glass. "Hello."

"They seem to be in a better mood," Hannibal commented, returning to the dish he was preparing.

"Yeah." Will set the glass of wine aside on the counter and stepped closer to Hannibal. "I think spending some time outside helped." Will's eyes wandered over the ingredients and he frowned as what he found there put itself together into a meal. "Hannibal," he scolded, calling maroon eyes to his face. "You fucking joking right?"

"It has a reason. I promise," Hannibal explained as he continued to peel the potatoes.

"You're not going to make those kids eat this, are you?" Will's guilt snapped back almost immediately and he ran a hand over his face. "Hannibal, you-"

Thudding on the stairs cut Will off and both boys came into the kitchen, looking curiously over the scene.

"Boys, would you like to help?" Hannibal asked innocently and Will bit his tongue, arms folded over his chest.

"Yes!" Morgan swiftly piped up, skipping over to where Hannibal was working. "What can I do?"

"There's some bread over there and a bowl. Can you rip the bread up into pieces and put it in the bowl?"

Morgan looked a little confused at first, but nodded, going to grab a chair from the dining table. He pushed it across the floor until there was a loud squeak and Walter rolled his eyes, stepping over and picking the chair up from the floor at Hannibal's shoulders tensing.

"I can do it!" Morgan protested with a huff.

“You’re going to damage the floors,” Walter explained. “Just let me get it to the counter for you.” Walter struggled a bit with how heavy the chair was, made of solid wood, but once it was in place, Morgan hopped up on it and went to work. “And for me?”

“For you?” Hannibal questioned, rinsing the potato off in the sink and placing it aside on a cutting board before turning his full attention to Walter. “Do you want to help?”

“Do I have a choice?” Walter asked back.

“There’s always a choice,” Hannibal assured.

Will reached out and gave Walter’s shoulder a reassuring squeeze, hoping that the boy knew that he didn’t have to do anything that Hannibal asked him. That there was a choice. That Walter was welcome to say no. Walter was always welcomed to say no.

Walter shook his head with a roll of his eyes and a shrug. “How can I help?”

“The potatoes need to be cut up and put in that pot if you want to help with that,” Hannibal offered with a small smile, pulling a knife from the knife block and holding the handle out towards Walter. Walter looked over it for a moment, not in hesitancy, but in thought, before he finally reached out and took it, doing as he was asked. “ *Mylimasis* , would you like to set the table?”

Will nodded dryly and took his wine once more, doing his best to settle down over what Hannibal had picked for dinner. It was just food. Will wasn’t certain why he was so worked up over it, but if the boys weren’t bothered, then he just had to let it go. After a deep drink, Will went to work as instructed, digging through cupboards until he found what he needed.

“It’s important to know when it’s time to turn the page,” Hannibal said into the kitchen, causing Will to pause, but the thunking of a knife on a cutting board and the light ripping of bread continuing pushed Will forward. “I would like you boys to start thinking about subjects you would like to learn. Anything at all. Until we are settled, I will be teaching you and I think it only fair that you get to pick some of the subjects you would enjoy partaking in.”

Walter snorted. “You’re going to teach us?”

“Hanni, can you teach me the piano?” Morgan asked without missing a beat, ignoring Walter’s comment.

“Of course I can,” Hannibal assured.

Walter shook his head. “I don’t want to learn anything.”

“There must be something,” Will pushed as he reentered the workspace to grab the next items to set the table with. “Anything in the world.”

“I want to learn to control my fear.”

The room fell still for a moment before Hannibal nodded. “I’m sure I can teach you that as well.” That seemed to be enough to put the kitchen back in motion. Walter went back to chopping and Morgan to ripping, Will back to setting the table, and Hannibal peeling potatoes.

“Hanni, you’re making turkey for dinner,” Morgan muttered, not in question, just in a hollow statement. Will stepped away from the now set table and moved over to Morgan, waiting for the tears to start again, ready to help. How he wasn't sure, but he would be there. Morgan tore up the last bit of bread into the bowl and looked up with a deep breath, eyes wet, but not crying. "Why?"

"Taste is not only biochemical. It's also psychological," Hannibal explained, and Will turned his attention to his husband.

"This was the last meal I was having with my parents," Morgan announced, voice stronger than Will thought it would be. The words caused Walter to stop his work, now finally understanding what was happening, finally putting the pieces together. Will could see the gears turning in his young mind.

"I know." Hannibal went for the trash bin and began scooping the potato peels from the sink and into the bin. "It's also the first meal that we'll have as a family."

"You're trying to remove the trauma with positivity," Walter murmured, setting the knife aside now that he had finished his work.

"No more bad," Hannibal agreed. "Only good going forward."

Walter shook his head. "I don't think that's possible."

"We'll figure it out," Will assured, once more taking Walter's shoulder in a firm grip. "It might take time, but we will figure this out."

"Walter, can you fill the pot with water and get it on the stove?"

"Sure," Walter answered, obeying Hannibal's light suggestion.

"Morgan, I have some herbs in the cabinet. Can you find me some thyme and rosemary?"

"I don't like rosemary." Morgan hopped from the chair and pulled it in the direction of the cabinet that Hannibal had pointed to.

"Just the thyme then. And Will?" Hannibal wiped his hands off on the towel over his shoulder and allowed Walter the space to get to the sink. Will let Walter's shoulder go and met those merlot eyes. A hand took his cheek and a kiss graced his lips. "We'll make this work together. Through the blood and the sugar."

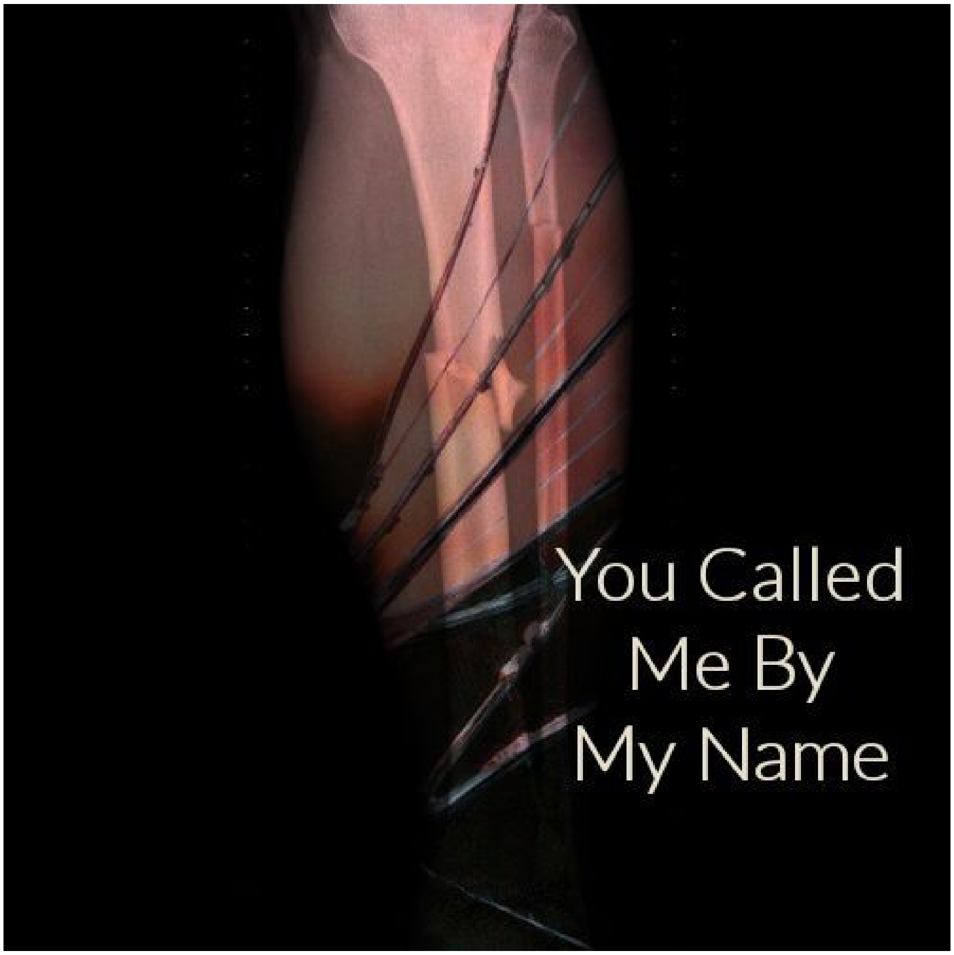
Kiekvienas žmogus skirtingai reaguoja į skausmą. Būtų gerai, kad tu tylėtum: Everyone responds differently to pain. It would be good for you to be silent.

Ketinu užsitarnauti teisę būti tavo tėvu: I intend to earn the right to be your father

Epilogue: You Called Me By My Name

Chapter Summary

“You’re not my mom, Hannibal!”



“Pompous asshole!” Walter hissed through his teeth as he slammed the back door of the house shut behind him. “Fucking bastard.” Walter hopped off the back deck and wandered away from the house and towards the forest that created their backyard, the space ever expansive.

Walter had found that getting lost in the trees when upset was the best way to handle any situation that included Hannibal Lecter. Tonight was no different, though usually his need to escape came right after school had concluded. Dinner tonight had been different.

Walter knew he had been in trouble from the moment that there was a shattering sound that echoed continuously through the large house. It made him flinch and wince and his chest constricted painfully as the shattering just seemed to continue for millennia, like the goblin body and armor falling into the well after Pippin accidentally pushed it in.

Not only had he broken the very clear rule of not playing sports in the house by kicking his soccer ball around, he had also kicked the ball into Hannibal's study, though why the study door had been left open was Walter's guess. Walter didn't even need to go inspect the damage to know exactly what had been smashed to pieces.

Hannibal had acquired an extremely old and nearly priceless tea set that was worse for wear and he had been repairing it using *Kintsugi*. He had been at it for days, slaving over the work when he wasn't teaching or out of the house. And Walter had ruined it.

Walter's brows knitted together painfully as he rounded the doorway of the study and found his ball off in the corner and the tea set in smithereens. There wasn't even a single tea cup left in one piece. The tea pot was tea shot to hell and indiscernible from a saucer, the creamer jug or the sugar pitcher.

Walter stared at the mess for a long moment, unsure at all what to do to fix it, knowing full and well as he sunk further into anxiety that there was absolutely nothing he could do but either tell Hannibal or let Hannibal find out. Which was worse, Walter wasn't sure. He had gone with both approaches on other occasions and neither turned out better than the other.

Hannibal was a firm believer in a mutated form of retributive justice. There was always a lesson to be learned in the punishment rather than just the punishment being given to cause Walter to suffer, but tonight sure as hell hadn't felt like that.

"Walter," Hannibal had said as they sat to eat, though Walter hadn't dared to touch anything in front of him because his body was already eating itself up enough. "Is there something that you wish to discuss with me?"

Will had stopped eating and closed his eyes, rubbing at them tiredly and Walter had never felt like more of a burden before than he had right in that moment. He had let down his dad... again. Despite his promises to do better, it never got any better. Every step he thought he made in the right direction was only twelve backwards.

"I broke your tea set," Walter blurted out, knowing it was better to say it outright than to make Hannibal string it from him. Morgan had stopped as well now, looking up with wide and curious eyes.

"Wally," Will whispered with a shake of his head. "How?"

"I was kicking the ball in the house." Walter slumped in his seat, looking at his hands in his lap.

"I see," Hannibal said, steepling his fingers at his chin as he looked over the oldest of the two boys.

"I'm sorry!" Walter's words were swift. "I didn't mean it. It was an accident."

"You're not allowed to play with the ball in the house, Wally," Will reminded lightly. "You know this."

"I know. I'm sorry."

"Thank you for your apology, Walter," Hannibal said in that damned calm voice that never rose to a yell. "I accept it, but that does not change the fact that you broke a house rule."

“I’m sure that Wally-”

“Don’t interrupt Morgan,” Will instructed gently. “This is not your place to speak.”

The young boy gave a small nod and returned to his food, picking at the rice with his spoon for a moment before eating a mouthful. Walter’s stomach churned at the sight and he pulled his eyes away, figuring that the best place for them would be to stay in his lap. He didn’t dare look up at his parents. He couldn’t stand facing that disappointment yet again.

“Will, you can correct me if I am wrong, but I believe that we had come to the agreement that if Walter played with the ball in the house again that he would be ineligible for sports this season,” Hannibal stated in a calm and clear tone before he took a sip of his nightly wine.

Walter’s heart twisted and contorted into odd shapes, choking his breath from his lungs. “Please, no!” he begged.

“Wally, you know that that was the next step if you disobeyed again,” Will pointed out, though his voice held a small bit of regret. He wouldn’t go against the punishment though. He never did. At least not in front of Hannibal. Will would go behind Hannibal’s back if the punishment allowed, but there was no way that Will could fix this mess. “No soccer this season.”

“But Dad!” Walter pleaded, sitting up further in his chair, finally meeting blue eyes that looked more sad than disappointed. “You know that that’s the only thing-”

“That doesn’t matter, Wally,” Will pushed with a deep breath. “You knew the consequences of your actions before you decided to play in the house.”

“That's all I have!” Walter argued, getting to his feet, voice louder than what was seen as respectful around the table. In his peripherals, Walter could make out Hannibal’s brows rising at the disturbance, but Walter couldn’t stop. “Soccer is the only thing that’s mine!” By now Morgan had stopped eating once more and was watching in shock. “You can’t take that away from me!”

“Wally,” Will scolded, setting his fork aside, brows furrowing. “This is not up for negotiation.”

“My mom wouldn’t have done this to me!” Walter yelled, pushing back on his chair so hard that the thick wood tipped and landed against the stone floor with a loud thwack that caused Morgan to jump. “And you know it!”

“Walter, in this household we-”

“You’re not my mom, Hannibal!” Walter finally turned himself to face those dark red eyes set deeply in a calm face that Walter wished to see some expression on for once in his life. “Stop pretending to be my dad because you’re not!”

“We can discuss this like adults or you may be excused, but the punishment stands, Walter,” Hannibal said in his ever even tone that made Walter’s blood boil. The cruel power that Walter knew was there was stuffed beneath a surface of cool glass, shoved away, though dangerous all the same. The robot. “What will it be, Walter?”

“Fuck off,” Walter hissed before he could filter himself and he strode from the table, hands fists at his sides. He could just barely make out Hannibal explaining the whole point of the punishment as he left the room most likely because Will was about to chase after him.

“By following through with consequences, he knows which behavior is acceptable. You're teaching him the natural and logical consequences of his behavior. If you don't enforce consequences, he learns that his behaviors have no limits, assuming the world bends to his whims.”

“Bends to my whims?” Walter laughed as he marched through the tall grass that gave way to trees and pine needles. “When has the world ever bent to my whims?”

Walter sighed and kicked angrily at the trunk of a tree. The pain radiating up his foot seemed to help the fire burn more while also dousing it and Walter wasn't exactly sure how it was possible to feel more worked up while calmed at the same time, but he didn’t honestly care.

He kicked the tree again. And again. And again. Until his foot was red hot and pulsing inside of his shoe. Until he limped when he walked on and into the quickly darkening night. Each step echoed with a dullness that forced Walter to inhale deeply to make sure that he didn’t whimper.

It wasn’t long before the sun had set, but Walter didn’t need the sun to know where he was going. He hid out here so often that he knew where he was to a certain extent. There was a lake somewhere off to the left that Will would take him fishing at. There was a decent sized creek that Morgan called a raging river that went to the lake and then there was a cliff side that Walter enjoyed.

He liked to look down the hill to the pit below that only had a straight rock wall on the other side. He had always been curious about what was down at the bottom of it. He could see a tipped over, rusted old car and that always sparked his curiosity how it had gotten there. The hood was all chomped in so maybe it had once belonged to McCoppin Scrapyard and the Iron Giant had thrown it when the horn began to go off and woke up Dean. That was Walter’s favorite explanation for it and the thought alone brought a small smile to his face.

Other than the car, Walter had seen glints of other metal things, maybe some glass items, but everything was far too far away for Walter to be able to actually make out. There was a large pipe that Walter thought maybe he could have used to walk down and into the pit, but it didn’t quite reach any access point.

Walter’s eyes wandered the oblong pit and stopped on something that he had never noticed before. A bicycle was in a tree. But not just in a tree. It nearly looked like some weird modern art with the way the tree had grown around the bike, only the back and front tires and handle bars showing, the rest swallowed up by the trunk.

Walter stepped up along the side of the pit to get a closer look in the last rays from the sun. The tree was tall. The bike must have been there for a long time because it was nearly half way up the tree. How had the bike gotten into the pit? How had it landed perfectly against the tree to be stuck like that? It was odd to be sure, but Walter only tipped his head to the side curiously.

The next step forward didn’t seem to connect to the ground. With a rumbling to life sound, the ground fell out from beneath Walter’s foot and his stomach rose into his throat as he fell. A pain shot through his thigh at the hyperextension in it and wind rushed in his ears, his heart thudding loudly until his body was snatched up by something sharp and hard.

Walter couldn’t stop the cry that left his lips at a sickening snap. Tears lined his eyes and fell hot and angry down his cheeks as a pure, intense, brilliant pain radiated up his leg. He almost didn’t notice the way his shirt was soaking with blood or the way that his upper body was caught between a tree branch and an odd formation of bricks. He was far more focused at where his ankle was caught awkwardly in another tree branch just high enough above his body that Walter knew there was no way to leverage himself out of his entrapment.

He sobbed as he tried anyway, using his elbow to try to push up against the bricks to move himself, but it did nothing. He couldn't unstick his arm from the tree and there was absolutely no way to unhook his leg. He didn't even dare try to move it now that his shin was beginning to swell and grow hot. His other leg that hung beneath him tried to search for any sort of purchase, but he couldn't find anything within reaching distance.

All he could do was wait. Just let his leg pulse and his blood go sticky and cold from whatever had scraped up his ribs in the fall. But who was he waiting for? He was supposed to go to his room. Hannibal hadn't been explicit in his instructions, but Walter had been punished enough to know that that was what Hannibal had meant. He was safe and angry in his bed.

No one would know he was out there. No one would know that he was in this pit. He had never told anyone about the pit before. He had thought that if he told anyone that Morgan would follow him to it. It was someplace that was strictly his and no one else's. Would it stay his forever now?

With a deep inhale that only sent more pain through his body, Walter called out as loudly as he could, so far away from the house that one could no longer see it.

"Help!" A sob left his throat and his head fell onto his shoulder as tears continued to run down his cheeks. "Damn it. Help me please. Someone! Help!"

"What are you still doing here?" Hannibal asked when he returned from the bathroom to find Will in the same spot he had left the boy. In bed with a book in hand. Will gave a one shoulder shrug in answer as he turned the page.

"Where else would I be?"

Hannibal's brows furrowed and he rubbed the towel through his hair to dry it. "Normally you would be sneaking Walter some food because he didn't get any dinner."

Will's eyes flickered up from the book and he exhaled, setting the book aside. He sat up from his slouch against the headboard with a small nod. "How long have you known?"

Hannibal set the towel aside and reached out for his sleep pants, tugging them on. "You often smell like whatever you heated up for him when you return to our room. You don't smell like *Tafelspitz,* which is what you would have given him because he doesn't care for *Paella Valenciana."*

Will gave a slight half smile before he wiped it away by rubbing at the scruff across his chin. "Were we too hard on him? He's right. Sports are the only thing that we let him have, that's his."

"Do you feel we were too hard on him?" Hannibal questioned in place of an answer, coming to sit on the edge of the bed. "We both discussed-"

"I know we discussed it, but I just-" Will groaned and rolled his eyes, getting to his knees so he could shift to be by Hannibal, wrapping his arms over Hannibal's shoulders and pressing his chest to Hannibal's bare back. Will kissed softly at the discolored skin over Hannibal's shoulder from the fire he had set so long ago. "I hate to punish either of them. I've told you this."

“Then what should we do? He has to learn that these rules are in place for his benefit. We can’t go back on our word.”

“Is there anything else we could do? Taking away sports will be like taking away his identity, Hannibal and you know it. We can’t strip that from him. We’ve already stripped away so many other things from both of them. Please.”

Hannibal sighed and leaned his head back and into Will who kissed at his cheek. “Frau Mülle needs help with her gardening. She’s getting too old to do the work herself,” Hannibal suggested. “His job will be to help her during the soccer season. If he wishes to play, he needs to complete work for her without payment. Is that fair?”

A smile cracked across Will’s face and he pressed another kiss to Hannibal’s cheek. “Thank you,” he whispered between more kisses. “He’ll be so happy.”

“Go get him some dinner,” Hannibal instructed with a small smile, nuzzling against Will’s kisses. “He’s probably starving.”

“I’ll be back in a bit.” Will released Hannibal and left the room.

Hannibal sighed and rested back in the bed, closing his eyes. It had been a year and nothing seemed to be getting any easier. Morgan had adjusted and acclimated perfectly. He had never been the issue, but Walter... Hannibal tried. He really did. He had from the moment he had married Will. But there was still some disconnect there. Something between the two of them that Hannibal just could not seem to bridge no matter what he tried.

It didn’t matter if he was nice. It didn’t matter if he bought Walter gifts. It didn’t matter if he expressed himself to Walter. It didn’t matter if he let Walter be. It didn’t matter what he did, Walter still wanted absolutely nothing to do with him and he had run out of ways to try to fix that.

“He’s gone,” a rushed voice said as Will raced back into the room. “He’s not in his room.”

Hannibal’s brows furrowed in question and he sat up, looking over Will who was hurriedly pulling on his boots. “Did you check Morgan’s room?” Hannibal suggested. “Or maybe he went to the kitchen?”

“I checked all of the usual places. He’s not there,” Will further explained. Once both of his shoes were tied, he dug through his bedside table drawer and pulled out a flashlight and one of his guns.

“I’m sure he’s somewhere around the house,” Hannibal said gently. “Let’s just go look for-”

“He’s not in the house, Hannibal.” Will checked the gun to make sure it was loaded before heading for the door. “I don’t think he ever was. He likes to go out back when he’s angry. He might have gone to the lake or the stream. He likes the water.”

“Alright.” Hannibal rose to his feet. “Let me get dressed and we’ll go look for him.”

Hannibal found himself on the back porch and looked around at their vast property of just forest. It went on for miles and Hannibal wasn’t even sure where to begin. Did they follow the water like Will had said? It was a fair bet. Walter was a creature of habit and ritual. He didn’t like to break his routine. He went to the same places when he was upset or anxious or needed to be alone and as far as Hannibal was aware, that was not the lake or the stream.

“I’m going to go check out by the fallen tree,” Hannibal announced, calling Will’s attention to him. “If we cover more ground, we could find him far more easily.” Will didn’t look like he fully agreed with Hannibal’s observation, but he didn’t argue. He simply nodded and they both went off in their own directions.

Hannibal wandered through the tall grass and in the direction of the pine that had tumbled over in the rather decent storm that had occurred when they had first arrived at their new home. A storm that had knocked out the power and had torn yards to pieces. The tree that had fallen had left a decent sized hole in the ground and a large root system open for the boys to play in.

By it was a pit that Hannibal had been wanting to eventually get cleaned out, though it hadn’t been too horribly pressing of a matter. In all honesty, he was fairly certain that the forest had reclaimed most of what had been hidden away in that hole. Not that it was man made in any sense of the word. It, according to his records, had once been someone’s property and had been overtaken by a sinkhole. It had swallowed up the home and car and surrounding trees.

It seemed like the right direction though. Walter had always been the curious type of person. He had always been a far more kinesthetic learner than Morgan ever had. Walter enjoyed hands on. He liked projects. He liked making things and fixing things. He liked to create things. He had recently helped Will replace the faucet in one of the bathroom sinks and had figured out how to fix a broken lamp he had picked up from someone’s trash bin. A pit of random junk would probably hold some interest for the boy.

The walk was long, longer than Hannibal had thought it would be until he finally stumbled upon the upturned tree whose roots were completely visible now that the dirt had been washed away. Hannibal glanced over it for a moment and was about to try to think of somewhere else to look when a faint whimpering caught his attention.

“Help.”

Hannibal thought he had possibly imagined the sound, but he stepped in the direction of it, answering it with his own: “Walter?”

“Hannibal?” The voice ticked up and Hannibal raced towards it. “Help! Please!” A crying followed the pleas, something etched with pain. “Please. Please help me.”

Hannibal stopped at the side of the hole and pulled the flashlight from his pocket that Will had made him take, shining it down below him. Walter flinched at the brightness and hid his face in one of his shoulders, body held at an awkward angle. The only thing supporting his body was an old tree and what looked like maybe a chimney from an old house. Both arms were caught. One leg dangled below him while the other was snuggly captured up in another tree branch, twisted at an odd angle and angrily red. The drop below him was a good two stories if Hannibal had to guess.

“Are you alright?” Hannibal asked down as he moved the light away from Walter to look around the hole to see if there was an easy way to get down to him. He didn’t want to leave Walter there and run all the way back to the house. It would be another good half an hour of Walter trapped out here if he did.

“My leg hurts, but I’m ok,” Walter assured through clenched teeth. “I can’t move.”

“Give me a moment, son. I’ll get you out.”

"How?"

Hannibal's light returned to Walter who once more hid his face away at the brightness. He was so far down that Hannibal couldn't just lean over and pull him out. "Do you trust me?"

Walter's eyes blinked open and he slowly looked up at Hannibal through the light. He was silent for a moment, his brow creasing as he thought about the question and Hannibal was ready for the ever normal, *Go get my dad. I want Will,* response, but it didn't come.

"Yes," the boy finally answered, causing shock to flood Hannibal. Hannibal blinked, waiting for his stunned body to finally move. "I trust you. Please help me. Please."

Hannibal gave a firm nod and once more looked around the large hole for something, anything. None of the trees had strong enough branches to hold him down where Walter had gotten to. But up the pit there was a metal beam that would support him. He didn't dare move it from where it was. It was snuggly dug into the sheer cliff side and there it would stay.

Hannibal lowered himself down into the pit, one hand clutching the side of it as his other used the flash light to see down onto the beam that his feet were firmly on. He released the side and took the beam with both hands, slowly lowering himself down and into the sinkhole.

His shoes, if he would have been wearing anything other than a pair of Will's boots, would have been soaked through in an instant. Luckily the water wasn't deep. It lapped at his ankles as he trudged through rubble and debris of a driveway of some sorts. He climbed over the rusted car and then looked over the structure of the two story house that was decently intact despite the fact that it was nearly fully sideways, trapped between both sides of straight rock.

Hannibal ducked under the roof and stepped around the house, light up until he found Walter's dangling leg.

"Are you alright for a moment longer?" Hannibal called up.

"Yeah," Walter grunted down. "Just... Please help."

Hannibal lowered the light and once more looked over the house before taking the edge of the roof and hoisting himself up onto it. There was a loud creaking and Hannibal paused before carefully rising to his feet. The roof was rotted and looked about ready to cave in, but he just had to risk it. He had to help the boy and oddly enough not because he was expected to like Hannibal had thought would be the case. He actually was worried for the child, though he couldn't show it.

The roof groaned under his weight in disagreement, but Hannibal pushed on in an awkward upwards angle until he reached the remnants of the chimney, the brick barely held together anymore. The mortar had long since dissolved.

When Hannibal finally reached the edge of the roof, he climbed over the lip and onto the adjoining wall and beside Walter. Hannibal's light wandered over the boy once more, trying to figure out the best course of action, the light coming on Walter's injured leg. It was obviously broken, the bone jutting out at an odd angle though it didn't break the skin.

"You're wearing jeans," Walter said through a tight jaw.

Hannibal held back a laugh at the noticed detail and knelt down beside the boy. “I couldn’t very well get you out of here in a suit.”

“It would have been entertaining,” Walter grumbled with a forced laugh that quickly turned to pain. “Please get me out.”

Hannibal nodded and reached out, brushing the boy’s longer hair from his eyes. They would have to cut it, but that was a task for another day. “There are two ways we can do this. I can lift you up and you can dislodge your foot or you can hold yourself up while I pull your foot from the tree. Both are going to be uncomfortable.”

“It’s broken, isn’t it?” Walter huffed out some air that only made his hair fall back into his face.

“It is.”

“Right.” Walter stayed quiet as his eyes flickered over the angle his leg was being held in. “Dislodge my foot. I don’t think I could move it.”

“Do you have a good enough grip to hold yourself up for me?” Hannibal rose back to his feet and carefully maneuvered himself closer to the tree that held Walter captive.

“Yeah. Just hurry.”

Hannibal leaned out over the edge of the house, one hand taking the side of the sinkhole for balance, flashlight pointed up at the tree. The house groaned under him again, but he ignored it. With his other hand he reached out and did his best to support Walter’s ankle before lifting it from where it was stuck. Walter’s cry of pain caused Hannibal to stop and look down at the boy whose teeth were clenched so tightly that they might shatter.

“Don’t stop,” he hissed and Hannibal carefully lowered Walter’s leg down. Once it was released, Walter’s arms strained against the extra weight and Hannibal did his best to hurry to take Walter’s arms and pull him up and onto the wall. The boy’s grip was tight on Hannibal’s arms and he was breathing hard when they finally settled themselves out on the house. “Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck,” Walter hissed, his hand immediately going to his leg. “I feel dizzy.”

“That’s normal. We’ll get it taken care of, Walter. For now...” Hannibal trailed off, the flashlight going around them to see the best option out, but he stopped when the beam of light fell once more on Walter. “You’re bleeding.” Hannibal reached out and pulled at the ripped shirt, to see long scrape marks up Walter’s ribcage. “Can you breathe alright?” The worried note was enough to cause Walter to freeze. “You didn’t break anything there, did you?”

“I can breathe just fine,” Walter replied slowly, wincing and pulling away from Hannibal’s searching hand. “Just a scratch.”

“You’re sure?” Hannibal pushed, once more catching Walter off guard. Walter could only stare at Hannibal who was busy touching the markings down his side. “They aren’t deep. They should be fine. You promise it doesn’t hurt to breathe?”

“Promise,” Walter answered. Merlot met butter and Walter swiftly looked away from the man. “I guess I won’t be playing this season, will I?”

“I don’t think that will be much of an option at the moment.” With a deep breath, Hannibal pulled his hand back from Walter’s injury and looked away from the boy. “I’m sorry.”

“Yeah...” Walter muttered. “It doesn’t matter now, I suppose. How do we get out?”

“Can you hold onto my back?”

Walter’s brows furrowed and he looked around them at the straight walls of rock, curious what Hannibal had in mind. Was he going to climb out? It wasn’t like he was spider man, unless the ever perfect Hannibal Lecter somehow had super powers. His wiry strength was enough to cause Walter to consider it, even momentarily.

“Yes.”

Without another word, Hannibal turned his back to Walter who wrapped his arms around Hannibal’s shoulders, clasping his hands tightly in front of the man. Hannibal pushed himself up onto his feet, bringing Walter with him and Walter hid his face into Hannibal’s shoulder as his body was adjusted into a position that Hannibal could work with.

“Shit,” Walter hissed. “Hannibal.”

“I know,” Hannibal hushed gently. “Bear with me. We’ll get some ice and pain killers when we get back to the house.”

“Are you going to set it?”

“No.” Hannibal stepped over the lip of the roof and turned so that he could use his hands to help slide down the slope of the roof without knocking Walter into anything. With the flashlight back in his pocket and them completely shrouded in darkness, the killer lowered himself to his hands and knees, feet towards the direction they were going. The smooth texture of the slate-shingles made it difficult to control their descent and Hannibal’s fingers dug into each individual tile to make sure they didn’t slip, boots not helping as much as he had hoped they would. “We’ll take you to the hospital. They could do it far better than I could.”

“Alright.”

Subtle creaking filled the night and Walter’s grip around Hannibal tightened. The creak turned to a cracking that made Hannibal pause in his descent, fingers aching as they clung to the shingles. Going up the roof had been easy, but the extra weight that Walter added wasn’t doing them any favors. The house had been unstable to begin with and now Hannibal waited to see if the house would settle before making any rash movements.

From beneath them the sound of items within the home tinkled and moved, nearly sounding like hale falling. Hannibal’s eyes closed tightly and he held his breath. “Do not let go of me,” he instructed Walter who nodded against Hannibal’s back with a small hum.

The clinking of bricks falling started off slow before growing louder and faster, some bricks splashing into the water below and Hannibal could only try to hold his grip on the slick surface of the roof as the angle began to extend.

Glass shattered and wooden beams snapped, the house groaning before dropping a few feet as the dirt walls around them gave. There was a whimper from Walter who clutched to Hannibal whose fingers had been sliced clean open on the shingles they held. The blood slicked his hold and his arms shook with the weight he was trying to hold with hardly any support.

Glass tinkled and the water splashed beneath them. Something in the house squeaked repeatedly and Hannibal placed it as a possible light fixture swinging under the sudden movement. He exhaled deeply and glanced down at the hold he had on the roof for a moment, trying to figure out how to possibly lower them down the height of the roof in one movement, but the angle was too steep now. He would slide if he wasn't careful. One wrong move and they were be slung down into the water that could have all sorts of broken things waiting in it for them.

He lowered a single hand down to the next shingle before following it with his opposite hand, the blood only causing an efficiently smooth surface to become that much harder to cling to.

An extremely loud, high pitched screeching noise erupted the night and it reminded Hannibal of a car trying to start up. The roar that came next was deafening as the house jerked, slipping from where it had been held up in place against both rock faces.

Before Hannibal had a chance to move, his grip faltered and he dropped, air knocked from his as his chest connected with the room of the house. Gravity, the ever methodical force, sucked them downwards and despite the way that Hannibal did his best to break their fall, all that occurred was sharp pains in his fingers as nails were ripped and shredded apart.

He attempted to contort his body to a position where he could turn his head to see what was beneath him and only found something darker than the night getting closer. The opposite wall.

With a sharp jerk the house landed, sending water in every direction as it finally found it's placement. Hannibal winced as he used his foot to break their fall and he hit the wall of the sinkhole, keeping Walter from hitting anything.

Hannibal's ankle screamed in pain as his wet fingers struggled to snatch up something to hold to so they didn't fall further off the room. Walter had hidden himself deep into Hannibal's shoulders, his hands holding fistfuls of Hannibal's shirt. He whimpered, breath hot against Hannibal's back.

"I hate fucking heights!" Walter hissed out, the agony crystal clear in his voice.

Hannibal didn't answer as he did his best to unwedge them from where his foot was trapped awkwardly between the roof and the rock. He pulled himself free and closed his eyes tightly, heat already causing his ankle to swell up in the boots.

"Are you alright?" Hannibal asked, taking a step across the roof that he absolutely could no longer step under to get out. He just hoped that the height from the roof to the ground wasn't too tall.

"Just get us out, please."

Hannibal used both hands to balance himself, one on the house roof, the other on the wall until he reached the edge, pulling the flashlight from his pocket and nearly dropping it from how slick his hands were. His thumb thudded painfully as he turned on the light and used it to see how far down they were needed to drop. Luckily it wasn't far.

The slight drop from the roof and into the water below sent a jolt of pain through Walter and he bit his tongue to try to stay quiet, but the whimper left him all the same. Hannibal frowned and one of his hands took where Walter's were around his neck and held them to reassure the boy that he was alright.

"I'm sorry," Walter whispered into Hannibal's shirt and he hid further into Hannibal's shoulder. Hannibal just kept moving back up the pit and towards the metal beam, curious if he was going to be able to climb back up it. "I'm so sorry. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

"*Nesijaudink. Tai jau nesvarbu." (Don't worry. It doesn't matter anymore.)* They reached the beam and Hannibal did his best to get a good grip on it before hoisting himself up onto it, noting the gasp from Walter. "*Viskas gerai. Tau viskas bus gerai.*" (Everything's alright. You will be fine.)

He wiped his hands off on his jeans to get a better grip on the beam and carefully climbed up it, the angle much more forgiving than the house had been. When he finally pulled them both free of the pit and rose to his feet, his first step was wobbly and unsteady. He let out a small gasp as his ankle rolled with the weight he added to it, but he pushed on, arms reaching back to help support Walter's body so his legs could relax and not grip Hannibal's middle as tightly as they had been.

The walk back was a slow limp, the house eventually coming into view after what felt like a lifetime of wandering through tall grass. Walter hadn't said another word, simply whimpered if Hannibal's balance wavered and when they were finally on the back porch, Walter's grip loosened.

"Do I have to go to the hospital?" he asked softly as Hannibal opened the back door and stepped into the house, closing it behind them.

"Yes. I do not have the equipment to set your leg here," Hannibal explained softly as if it would disturb the household.

"I don't like the hospital," Walter complained, though he didn't fight when Hannibal helped lower him into one of the island kitchen chairs.

"We'll be right there with you." Hannibal made his way over to the sink and turned on the water, filling the palm of his hand with soap. He began to scrub at his hands, stopping at the bright and sharp pain in each of his fingers, a good portion of which were missing nails. But that wasn't important now. Walter was what was important.

Hannibal fetched an icepack from the freezer and some pain killers and water. He set them in front of Walter and looked towards the sound of the back door opening and closing.

"Hannibal?" Will's voice called through the house. "I can't find him."

"In here," Hannibal called back, before his attention returned to Walter. "Take those please."

Will's footsteps rushed into the kitchen and there was a breath of relief as he raced over to where Walter sat, pulling the boy into a hug against his chest. "Don't you ever fucking wander off like that again!" Will hissed, nuzzling his nose into Walter's hair. "You gave both of us a heart attack."

"I'm sorry Dad," Walter whispered.

"Will, Walter needs to be taken to the hospital," Hannibal explained as he grabbed a hand towel to try to dry his still bleeding hands. "Can you stay here with Morgan?"

“Yes?” Will pulled back from Walter and began to look over the boy, his eyes landing on his leg with a frown, concern lacing his voice. “Are you alright?”

Walter shook his head with a shrug and a distant laugh. “I don’t know.”

“He’ll be alright,” Hannibal assured, stepping closer. “It just needs to be set.”

Will’s eyes darted up from Walter and to Hannibal, taking in the limp the man had and the blood dripping from his fingers. Will didn’t release Walter, but even more worry slipped across his face. “You got hurt too. Where the hell were you two?”

“The pit. I fell in,” Walter explained softly from where he was once more clutched to Will’s chest. He let his eyes close with a deep, relieved breath.

“You went to the- Walter!” Will scolded before a blurted out laugh left his mouth. “I’m just glad you’re safe. You both are.”

“Would you help me get him situated in the car?”

“Just wrap your arm around my shoulder,” Hannibal instructed as he scooped the larger boy from the front seat of the car. Walter winced, lip pulled between his teeth, eyes shut tightly. Walter clutched to Hannibal as instructed and hid his face deep in Hannibal’s neck.

“It hurts so badly,” Walter gasped out, his voice shaking with being on the verge of tears. Each one of Hannibal’s steps was a jolt from the man limping, but Walter tried to ignore it.

“Shh, *Mangustėli. Tiesiog palaukite šiek tiek ilgiau*.” (Little moongoose. Just wait a little longer.)

Walter glanced up slightly at the name that he had been called only a handful of times before. He didn’t know the exact meaning behind it, but he took it as some sort of endearment. Hannibal had only ever called him it when he had tried to connect with Walter. Walter had shoved it away, noting the way that a similar nickname was given to Morgan, so it obviously wasn’t as important as Hannibal tried to enforce. But at this moment, Walter couldn't bring himself to hate the name.

Walter kept his head hidden in Hannibal’s neck as they were greeted at the front desk by a receptionist. Walter was only able to catch a few of the words spoken in very swift German. Luckily Hannibal had cleaned both of them up enough before they left to look presentable so there weren’t any awkward questions about bloody clothes and torn fingernails, or so Walter assumed. He wasn’t exactly sure.

But soon Hannibal took a clipboard of some paperwork to fill out and moved over to a couch to begin working on it. Walter sat carefully in Hannibal’s lap and the clipboard set over Walter’s thighs gingerly. The pen scratched while another nurse was called and glanced over at Walter for a moment before leaving down a long hallway, most likely to get a wheelchair if Walter had to guess.

Walter watched as the nearly foreign language was written out across the empty spaces across the page, until Hannibal came to a certain line that Walter knew all too well. He knew what those words meant and he knew exactly why Hannibal hesitated with Walter watching him work.

On other forms that a guardian had to sign, normally Will filled them all out and so this had never come up as somewhat of a dilemma. But the longer that Hannibal hesitated over what to write, Walter reached out and took the pen, scribbling the word *Vater* (Father) across the line. He blinked at the word, hand stilling as he came to the realization of what he had written.

Not a word needed to be spoken. Hannibal clearing his throat seemed to speak volumes enough. Walter held the pen out to the man and Hannibal took it back to finish filling out the paperwork now that the issue had been settled. An air of something that Walter couldn't quite place settled in around the two of them as Walter settled back into the strength of the man who had been injured himself just to protect him.

The nurse returned with a wheelchair and Walter's grip instinctively tightened around Hannibal's neck at the realization that he was about to be pulled away from the man. Hannibal inhaled deeply and held the finished paperwork out to the nurse who took it and began flipping through it without a word.

Hannibal's eyes turned their attention to the boy who was curled up against his chest. He had never known Walter to be afraid. Or at least, he had never shown it in such a way before. He wasn't clingy, he wasn't small, and he didn't hide for protection. That wasn't the Walter that Hannibal had come to know and in all honesty, Hannibal wasn't sure what he was meant to do with this new side of the boy.

Walter was stubborn to the point of near impossibility. He was loud and only listened to the word *no* because Will made sure he did. Walter would have a bright future as a lawyer if he wanted to ever pursue the avenue. He had an argument or loophole for everything and would use them just to get under Hannibal's skin even on the worst of days.

“Don't leave me alone,” Walter whispered in explanation. “I don't trust them.”

“They won't hurt you,” Hannibal tried to reason, but Walter only shook his head in disagreement. “They're trained and will take-”

“I can't speak German.” Walter sat up just enough to meet Hannibal's maroon eyes. “And I trust you far more than I trust them. Don't leave me alone, Father.”

Hannibal's eyes widened slightly and Walter was surprised to see shock on Hannibal's features. It was rare to see anymore than just a small flicker of emotion on the man's face and Walter wasn't exactly sure why Hannibal looked so stunned. It wasn't a new name. Morgan called him that all the time now. Walter wasn't exactly sure when the name had changed from Hanni to Father, but he had just tried to let it slide off his back, swearing that he would never fall into that same trap. That same charmed spell that both his dad and Morgan had fallen into, but it seemed like he hadn't been able to escape after all.

Hannibal licked at his suddenly dry lips and tried to ignore the way that something light pulled in his chest. Morgan had been calling him Father for months now, but Walter had made a strong point to only ever call Hannibal by sir or his name. To hear that one single word slip from Walter's mouth opened up a whole new room that Hannibal was hesitant to explore. The unknown had never bothered him before, but Walter was a different beast altogether and Hannibal didn't know if he was quite ready for the honor that came with that unknown finally being open to him.

“You do understand what you're saying,” Hannibal muttered out, surprise lacing his breath. He stared at the boy curiously, waiting for Walter to change his answer or come to the realization of what he had just said.

“Yes, I do. Don’t go.” Walter’s brows furrowed in worry at approaching footsteps and he swiftly changed to Lithuanian in fear of one of the nurses possibly knowing English and understanding his request. “*Ar negalite to padaryti patys?*” (Can't you do it yourself?)

“*Ar tikitės, kad paprašysiu medicinos personalo leisti man susitvarkyti jūsų koją naudojant jų įrangą?*” (Do you expect me to ask the medical staff to let me tidy up your leg using their equipment?) Hannibal asked with a small smile, the idea worth entertaining for amusement’s sake at the very least.

“*Taip, tėve. Prašau.*” (Yes, father. Please.)

“*O kas, jei jie man neleis?*” (And what if they won’t let me?)

There was an interesting shift in the air that caused Hannibal pause and he wondered if it was the same environment that Will had experienced once long ago with this same boy as a flicker of darkness peaked out behind the mask in place.

“*Galite priversti juos daryti viską, ko norite. Aš žinau, kad tu gali.*” (You can make them do whatever you want. I know that you can.) The words from the boy’s mouth were low and harsh, pulling at Hannibal’s interest once more. Walter always held a fascination for Hannibal, something that he couldn’t quite put his finger on. How much like Will the boy was. Fighting so hard against the nature that was inside of him.

A smile ticked up the corners of Hannibal’s lips. “I am going to be with you every step of the way.”

“*Tėvas-” (Father-)*

“Nothing will ever happen to you while I am around. You’re perfectly safe,” Hannibal assured, eyes flickering up to the nurse who was patiently waiting to wheel Walter somewhere further into the hospital. “*Aš nugriausiu kiekvieną iš jų, jei jie tave įskaudins.*” (I will demolish each of them if they hurt you.)

“I’m fine,” Walter repeated for Will once more as Hannibal limped him through the house and up the stairs to his room, Will following close behind them. “Really. Just tired.”

“They have him taking some painkillers that will probably keep him decently drowsy for the time being,” Hannibal explained over his shoulder.

“How long will he be in the cast?” Will questioned, opening up the bedroom door when they finally reached it.

“Fortunately it was a clean tibial shaft fracture. One to two months and then a brace. It could take up to six months before he’s fully healed though.”

“No soccer,” Walter grumbled, causing his dad to laugh nervously.

“I don’t think that soccer is what you should be worried about,” Will scolded lightly, sitting on the edge of the bed as Hannibal rested the boy down. Walter snuggled down into the pillows with a yawn as Hannibal carefully covered him with the blankets. Will brushed back the boy's hair with a sigh. "I'm glad you're alright."

"Morgan?" Walter questioned, his eyes already closed and his voice barely above a mumble.

"Asleep," Will answered. "Like you should be."

"Is there anything else you need before we go to bed?" Hannibal asked gently, a hand taking Will's shoulder with a light squeeze. Walter shook his head with another yawn. "I'll check on you in a few hours for your next dose of medicine."

"Ok." Will rose from the bed with a deep breath and let Hannibal guide him from the room to let the boy rest. "Night Dad."

"Night Wally," Will called over his shoulder reaching out to close the bedroom door behind them.

"Night Father."

Will paused, hand frozen on the door handle, something sharp filling his chest. It wasn't so much a bad feeling as it was something of shock. He looked from Walter's body in his bed and to his husband who didn't meet his gaze.

"Goodnight, son," was Hannibal's answer and Will couldn't stop the smile from spreading over his lips as the feeling of *finally* set over him. Will closed the door and turned back to his husband who didn't address the comment, just kissed him lightly and took his hand. "Let's get some rest too, my love."

"How are-"

"I'm fine." Hannibal's hand slipped around Will's waist and guided him down several winding hallways and towards their room. "Promise."

"How long has he been calling you that?" Will questioned, causing Hannibal to pause before finally opening their bedroom door to enter it. Will couldn't help but smile as Hannibal ignored the question and went to the bathroom to get ready for bed. Will sat on the edge of the bed and rubbed at his face with a deep breath. "Hannibal, when did he start calling you that?"

"Tonight," was answered from the open bathroom door, the running water of the sink starting up.

Will collapsed back on the bed and closed his eyes. He could recall the first day that Walter had finally called him dad and the amount of pride that had come with it. The feeling that Will was finally doing something right with his life and that he was accepted by this child who wasn't his, but he was absolutely going to put in the effort for, because that was what Walter deserved. It was something euphoric.

"How does it feel to be a parent?" Will teased as the water turned off and uneven footsteps left the bathroom. The bedroom fell into darkness as the bathroom light was turned off.

"Better than the first time," Hannibal replied as he sat on the other side of the bed. Will tipped his head back to look over Hannibal curiously and Hannibal met his gaze with a soft smile, leaning across the bed to place a kiss to Will's lips. "She is not the subject of this conversation."

"Does she need to be? We've never really gone into full depth about-"

Will was hushed with another kiss. “Not tonight, my love.” Hannibal collapsed into the bed, head beside Will’s, nuzzling into the boy’s curls. “I would rather sit in the bliss that is this moment if you don’t mind.”

“I would never rob you of it. Walter is difficult to connect with.”

“Just like his dad.”

Will snorted and nipped teasingly at Hannibal’s cheekbone.

Walter listened as his parents’ footsteps faded away and on the foggy precipice of sleep, he could make out something opening and closing. It wasn’t until he felt a family presence force its way into the bed with him that Walter finally was able to place what it was.

“Morgan,” Walter grumbled with a frown, nuzzling his face into his pillow. “Not tonight please.”

“I didn’t have a nightmare,” Morgan answered, snuggling down into Walter’s side.

“Then why are you here?”

“You always protect me when I’m scared or hurt. It’s my turn now.”

“What kind of shit is that, Einstein?” Walter yawned once more, sleep pulling so tightly on his body that he felt heavy with it. “Can we please just sleep?”

“Ok Wally. I hope you feel better.”

“Thanks kid.”

Sneak Peak

Sex:
Race:
Nationality:
Lithua
05/10/
Date
Surgeon
Signature
Hannibal Lecter
1. R. Index Finger
3. R. Middle Finger
4. R. Ring Finger
Thumb
2. L. Index Finger
3. L. Middle Finger
4. L. Ring Finger

I enjoy giving each of my characters songs that represent them. Several of the characters I don't want to give away yet so I have listed them as unknown. But I hope you enjoy each of the songs. And then below are snippets of the sequel that I am writing. Not sure when it will be posted, but I'm super excited about it. I just want to get it a bit more pinned down and fleshed out before I start posting it.

Songs:

Walter: Smash Into Pieces - All Eyes On You (Official Lyric Video)

Morgan: Tate McRae - you broke me first (Lyrics)

Hannibal: game of survival | ruelle | lyrics

Will: AViVA - Psycho (Lyrics)

Unknown: Stone Cold - Demi Lovato (Lyrics)

Unknown: Rescue Me

Freddie Lounds: Lyrics Show For Everyone: MALINDA - Don't Make Me

Doctor Chilton: Three Days Grace - Get Out Alive (Official Audio)

"You both complement each other beautifully," Hannibal added. "Like a-"

"Tea set," Walter finished with a nod. "Am I the teacup or the saucer?"

"Tea cup," Hannibal stated. "The saucer may support you, but you hold everything inside of you. Morgan is your saucer. He will stabilize you, but you are the one everything must fall on. It is only natural that you are the responsible one."

"You remember my husband," Will said.

Hannibal stretched out his hand and kept his face fairly blank when Oliver spoke. "Yes, the woman in the relationship." Oliver wore a smile as he shook Hannibal's hand, but Hannibal didn't find the jest very funny. Quite the opposite actually.

"I'm afraid that would be me," Will interrupted quickly to pull Oliver's attention from Hannibal. Hannibal pulled his hand free and wiped it on his pants nonchalantly.

"Please," Oliver said with a laugh. "You hunt and fish, fix boats and cars and he stays home with the children and takes care of the house. I think he knows his place."

"Should I assume you mean the kitchen?" Hannibal asked, the question innocent enough.

"That's where all good housewives stay."

"I..." Walter closed his eyes with a deep breath. "I need Hannibal Lecter for this conversation." Walter's eyes opened once more and Hannibal lifted his chin curiously, something cool and collected covering his features. "Please, don't be my father. Don't be my therapist. Please be Hannibal the Cannibal. Please."

"You know," he said, causing the man to freeze and slowly turn around. Morgan stepped a little closer and reached out, taking the sunglasses from the taller man's nose. "You would be able to see those better without these." Sea bottle green met Morgan and he couldn't help but stare at the delicateness of glass in that gaze.

I want to see him once without restraints. You can have as many guards there as you would like. But I want an hour without restrictions. After the hour I will let you take me into full custody. But only after the hour is up.

"Do. You. Understand?" Morgan asked once more, irritation slipping into his words as his eyes went dark. Paul gave a nod and Morgan released his grip on Paul's hair. "Get out."

"Will that stop me from dying?" she asked, voice steadier than she thought it would be as she stared at the beast in front of her.

Will hummed for a moment as if in deep contemplation, before he stopped his pacing and faced her. "No," Will answered, stepping closer. He had a funny little grin playing across his lips that she couldn't quite place, but it sent a deeply unpleasant shiver through her. "Oh, no, no, no." There was a laugh. "That won't stop you from dying, but I promise it won't be as gruesome of a death if you participate and help us out. I can be quite persuasive."

"Will you ever let me see you?" he asked as he paced the ornate study, a letter opener in his hand. He glanced over the miniature version of Excalibur and his fingers trailed over the cross in the hilt. There wasn't an answer from behind the room divider and he wandered over to the large cloth wall that had been put up. He looked over the shadow that was always sat in the same place, a man in a wheelchair. "Doctor, I can promise that I have seen much worse than you."

"Good. Then you should be able to remember the rules," his voice, though all that was heard was that strange computer tone, seemed like it would be degrading in some way if the man were actually able to speak. "Do not touch the glass. Do not approach the glass. You pass her nothing but soft paper. No pencils or pens. No staples or paper clips in her paper. Use the sliding food carrier. No exceptions. If she attempts to pass you anything, do not accept it. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, I understand, sir."

When the cell was reached it opened up into a lovely little room with glass walls instead of bars like the other cells had. It almost didn't look like a mental hospital room. There was grace and poise to it. Something lovely and rich, almost as if it had come from the very heart of Europe. Only the finest wine and cheeses were ever permitted behind the walls of glass.

Standing quietly in the exact center of the cell, supported with crutches, was a stunning woman. Her hazel eyes, which leaned a little more blue, sparkled under blond lashes and her golden blonde hair looked healthy, though it sat straight down her back and there was a sneaking suspicion that it had once upon a time been wonderfully curled. She had a chin that looked like it had been cut out of marble, her skin so long out of the sun it looked leached of all color. She fit with the room, somehow, the room of dark rocks, newspaper clippings and ripped pages out of books. They felt the same. Cool. Posh. Luxurious. Mad.

“May I speak with you?”

“You're one of Jack Crawford's, aren't you?” she questioned without a second thought, her voice monotone and slow as if she were trying to savor each and every syllable that poured from her lips that should have been a bright red rather than a natural pink.

“I am, yes, ma’am.”

“May I see your credentials?” Distrust laced her voice.

“Certainly.” An ID was pulled from a pocket and held out towards the glass. The woman turned her head to look over it curiously.

“Closer, please,” she beckoned. The ID was held out further. “Closer.” A few steps were taken towards the glass, but no closer than what had been explained earlier. Her eyes lingered on the agent for a moment or two longer before they finally flickered down to the ID, reading over it carefully. A smile came to lift the corner of her lips, though it didn’t seem like it performed the task very often. “This expires soon. You're not real FBI, are you?”

“I'm still in training at the academy.” The ID was hurriedly pulled away and stuffed back into its home pocket and once more hazel started.

Her smile dropped momentarily before her eyes lit up at the prospect. “Jack Crawford sent a trainee to me?”

“Yes, ma’am. I'm a student. I'm here to learn from you. Maybe you can decide for yourself whether or not I'm qualified enough to do that.”

She hummed at the challenge.

Update

Hello!

I just wanted to give everyone an update. I have been working on the sequel to this story before the first one was even finished. I have the whole plot planned out and just need to write it.

Unfortunately my beta and I had a falling out and they have blocked me on all social media and all ways to contact them after having deleted and removed documents containing writing for the sequel on Google Docs. I have tried everything I can to reach out to them, but they won't speak to me and I can't get these documents back.

There are several hundred pages missing that I need to rewrite and it has pretty much taken the wind out of my sails. It has been on my mind so much so that I can't even relax and enjoy an amazing trip I am currently on.
Right now I am currently driving through Florence, Italy and into Milan. Beautiful country and it's so amazing to see everything that I've been writing about for the sequel.

So please be patient with me while I try to get everything reorganized and try to rewrite a lot of my things.

Thank you all for the support. Please do not send my beta hate. I really do still think of them as a friend and wish we could have ended on better terms. I just thought you all needed an update as to what has been going on.

I hope you're all having a wonderful summer and I am now working with some new lovely people on getting the first few chapters ready to post hopefully soon. Again, currently traveling through Italy, so I'm a bit of a ways away from home and my computer.

All my love and until my next post, happy reading!

Chapter 50

NEXT BOOK FIRST CHAPTER HAS BEEN POSTED! AHHHHHHHHHH!

End Notes

Thank you guys so much for your comments and kudos! They keep me going.

Thanks again to my beta, @PitaGonzalezMe on twitter.

Works inspired by this one

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!